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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

ISAAC ASIMOV
It's A Wonderful Town!

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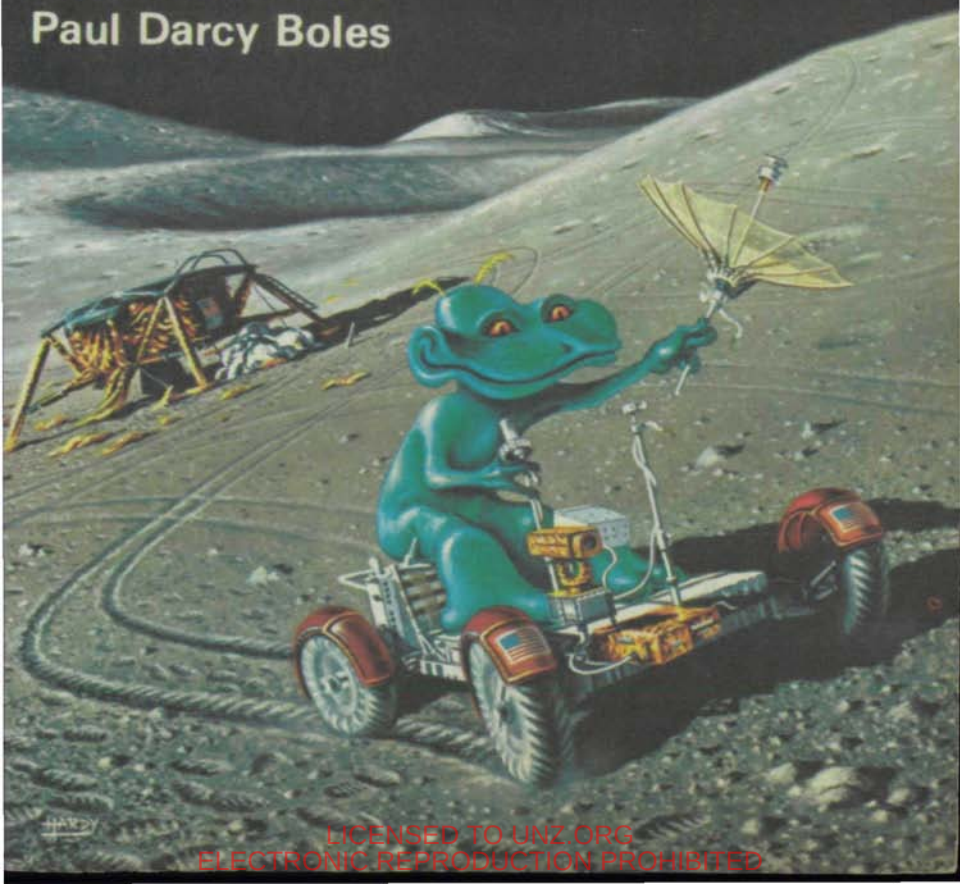

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Paul Darcy Boles, whose colorful and entertaining stories have been appearing here since 1970, had a major success last year with the publication of a bestselling novel, THE LIMNER, from T. Y. Crowell.

The Sunday We Didn't Go to Lemon's

by PAUL DARCY BOLES

My Uncle Ross met Belinda in the course of his duties as postmaster. I wasn't there at the time — I figure on the edges of affairs in this story, a kind of quiet Greek chorus — but knowing how he handled the mail, I can see how it happened. He'd have been behind his wicket in that cool, ink-and-rubber-smelling cave from which he doled out the letters and circulars to the customers who were too avid to wait for the mail to be put up in their boxes. It was a special service he threw in then for the joy of it. His long fingers riffled through the mail with great expert accuracy; the mail seemed to spray from them as he shot it out to the recipients. And he'd keep up a running patter as he performed this six-day-a-week miracle. "Seed catalogue for you, Mrs. Evans — and a note from your daughter, it looks like, over in Spring Hill. And for you, Mister Muslim, a long tan envelope — looks like a tax statement, though it could be just a reminder. *And* a fat letter from Mister Gradys, guess he's still visiting his brother. And for you —" It was wonderful to watch, to hear.

And when he came to Belinda Strite, he stopped cold and looked at her. She was a tall handsome woman with yellow hair and a carriage that sailed along as though her feet didn't quite touch the ground; not that they spurned it, she was earthy enough to be fun to be around. He took in the dark-green eyes and the trim dress, primrose to complement her hair, and the way she gazed straight back at him, amused and thoughtful. Then he said, "Do for you, ma'am?" and she said, "I'd like to rent a box, please." Her voice, he told me, was low and rich — he didn't say "an excellent thing in a woman," but that's what he

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meant. So he finished distributing the rest of the mail, then put up what was left over for those box holders who hadn't yet come in for their correspondence, and brought his full attention to Belinda Strite. In the course of having her make out a box-rent form he found among other things — though the form didn't call for it — that she was a widow, was about his age, and that she did piano teaching and voice lessons and plain and fancy sewing for a living, and was living in the old Hallam cottage over on Water Street. Not at the same end of Water Street we lived, but over on the bushy side where the streets weren't quite so old.

It was quiet at the post office after all this business had been transacted and would be until the second mail of the day came in, toward noon. So he shut up the office — leaving old Ike Fentriss asleep on the bench in front of it — and genteely escorted Belinda Strite over to Mac's for a cup of coffee. He'd been postmaster for twelve years; he felt he had a good deal of latitude in the running of it. Over coffee — Mac's was very strong — they got to know each other in that casual-quiet way some people do, and he made a tentative date to take her out Saturday night to the Silver Cornet Concert in the park.

Now, up to here, it all sounds very bucolic and quiet — a thing of thirty-five or forty years ago, hardly fit to trouble the deep waters of a town that size, or make any splash in the world. But at about this point it turned complicated. For the Saturday night date was so successful — so "likeable," as he said later, a word which he stretched to cover most good experiences — that he also invited her home for Sunday dinner the next day. No doubt by this time they'd swapped a good many confidences, he explaining that he'd never married because he had had to start taking care of Freda and Allison, his twin sisters, when he was fairly young; and that *they* had never married just because — well, because they weren't the marrying kind. He'd probably explained about me as well — the point that my parents had expired, in a heinous automobile accident, a while before and I'd come — bearing part of a trust fund which was enough to take care of my "keep" until I could go out in the world and earn it — to live with him and his sisters. And she'd probably told him about her uneventful but satisfactory life to date. He'd forgotten to tell her that he wasn't what any historian could have called master of his house; I could see when he brought Belinda for Sunday dinner that it was going to be a tense time.

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In fact, the tension started that Sunday morning, if it hadn't already begun working the night before when he got home from the Silver Cornet Concert. At any rate, it hit me between the eyes while we were all at breakfast. The breakfast room lay just off the kitchen in the big house above the river, and from there you could see the bronze river-water rippling around the dock. The dock led out to my uncle's inventing shed, a big, three-storied building on piles in the water, the whole reflected there in that ever-moving current as though the shed were a boat which, some day, might pull up anchor and sail off when nobody was looking. I always thought it was nice that my uncle had, doggedly, kept at least one place — one hobby — sacrosanct from his sisters. They had their hands in everything else he did, and they ran him the way they tried to run the town. They were members of every sewing circle in the county, they had their fingers in school board and county government pies; they were arbiters of the religious life of the community, and of course they must have known even before he mentioned it that he'd "got himself mixed up" with a widow woman. So when they started in, Freda beginning it by an acid remark to the effect that she supposed he'd want her to drag out Grandmother Calvert's silver for the event, Allison following up by remarking that the town already had a perfectly good sempstress and didn't need another — when they began their barrage, I kept close watch on my uncle and hoped, this time, he'd keep his end up and insist on his rights as a human being. It might be hard, but I knew I'd side with him, for whatever weight that could make.

"I suppose it means we'll have to pass by our Sunday afternoons at Lemon's," said Freda, on the heels of Allison's remark.

Going to Lemon's, a large pharmacy which seemed to stay open Sundays just for the purpose of entertaining them, and maybe selling a little ipecac or a few Sunday papers on the side, was a tradition in his house. I'd never liked the tradition. It was pleasing, all right, to sit in the big room with the slow fans turning overhead and to eat chocolate and butterscotch sundaes out of silver-bottomed cups and speak of the week's trials and triumphs, but it was also too settled, and I knew better ways to spend a Sabbath afternoon. "For," said my Aunt Freda now, liberally buttering her toast, "we'll have to make conversation here, and amuse her, and I don't know what all —"

My Uncle Ross had a deep, throaty voice, seldom on the edgy

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side. Now it was edged. "No reason why she couldn't go along with us to Lemon's. As for making conversation, I think you'll find Bell's a good talker. A very intelligent one too — she talks about things outside day-to-day ideas. Has a sharp quick mind."

"Oh, does she," said Allison. She leaned forward at peril of dipping her shirtwaist in the marmalade. "And it's 'Bell' now, is it. And I'll have you know, Roston Hatcher, there's such a thing as tradition — we don't ask just any new body to Lemon's with us on Sundays."

My uncle blinked a couple of times. In his mid forties, he was a handsome man, with a lean face that would have been saturnine, or brooding, if it hadn't as a rule been filled with a kind of inward satisfaction. Now that satisfaction was being slapped down and rifted apart. It wasn't the first time this had happened, I knew. I'd lived here long enough to have heard stories of other women, other projects, which had been stopped completely by my aunts' steel whims.

At length he said, rumbling, and finishing a last bite of oatmeal before he stood up, "If you stay here all morning arguing about it, you'll be late to church. I've asked her for dinner at noon; I'll pick her up then. I expect you'll serve good fare, in style, and act as though this is a human friend of mine I want to make welcome. We'll decide later about going to Lemon's, or not."

And with that he swung away toward the outside door. "I'm not going to church," he said in the doorway. "Got a thing of mine close to finished, and I feel the itch to work on it some this morning. Come on down, Mike, if you want to, when you're through with breakfast."

I said I would, and thanked him. He shut the door behind him, and through the window I saw him go rangily and swiftly down the outside steps to the green yard and then to the dock and out to his inventing shed, and I saw him unlock the padlock on its heavy door and go in, shutting the door behind him. In a moment, I took satisfaction in remembering that the shed was a holy place into which he didn't ask just anybody; my aunts had never, to my recollection, been invited to go inside. I had always taken it as a compliment that he let me hang around it, often on summer evenings after he'd shut up the post office and was busy machining, and measuring, and cutting, and sawing, and consulting various plans which he had drawn himself, and blueprints which were completely foreign to me. I knew that in the past — his comparative youth

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— he had invented a couple of useful devices; a fountain pen which wrote more smoothly than any I'd ever seen, if the model were any criterion; a sled with a motor on it, which worked slickly even in deep snow, long before the word snowmobile had ever been coined or suggested. I knew too that for the past seven or eight years — even predating my coming here to live — he'd been at work on a more monumental idea. The idea, the thing, which nobody had ever yet got him to talk about, lived behind the corrugated-iron dividing doors in the back part of the inventing shed — the part that was windowless and that only my uncle entered.

Sometimes people asked him, in a fooling but serious way — they really wanted to know — what he was building there, and he always said, "A freedom buggy." It had long since got to be a town joke: "How's the freedom buggy, Ross?" "Growing, growing, thank you." It was a joke so old it had settled into the roots of the town and didn't even have to be brought out much any more; there and nourishing, but hardly pertinent to daily life.

My aunt Freda narrowed her heavy-lidded eyes — both aunts were heavy, not only in the eyelids, but in the hips and through the busts; it was all those sundaes that did it, I thought — and a couple of tears came out. They weren't quite crocodile, but they didn't seem natural to me either. "Ah, Michael," she said to me, the gold watch on her shirtwaist-bosom trembling, "you don't know what it is to have a thankless brother. After all we do to keep him on the straight and narrow —"

Freda bustled around the table to pat me on the head. Meantime, Allison patted *her* head, that crown of silver gray abutted by what were known as "rats," extra coils of hair which made Freda appear somewhat top-heavy. "If we let him go he'd have us in the poorhouse in ten minutes," murmured Allison. I squirmed, not wanting to be included among their orphans-of-the-storm society. I hated these times of tears and mutual admiration, knowing that my uncle was a deeply put-upon man who suffered a great deal in silence and glad he had the resilience to do so. "Let go my head," I said finally and stood up. I was thirteen, which is no age to rebel against anything as settled and deep-gripping as my aunts' convictions. All the same, sometimes I had to. "It's his house, isn't it? He pays the bills, doesn't he? He keeps up all this and never yells about it. Why don't you just let him alone and try to be nice to this lady he's bringing for dinner? She sounds swell to me!"

It was an abortive and even

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weak rebellion, for all it felt strong and pulsed in my veins. My Aunt Allison's eyes — a little narrower and more punched in flesh than Freda's — narrowed further and got a steel-chip glint. "Late spring and time for sulfur and molasses," she said. "Your blood's running thick and bad from the winter. I think your kidneys could be cleaned out with a batch of lithia water, too."

She had medicine chests full of such nostrums. She might have meant them well, but she knew how noxious they were, too. I said, "You can dose me till I die, I'm on his side!" and ran from the table to the door and from the door went bounding down the steps and then across the yard to the dock. Behind me, my Aunt Allison's voice lifted on the air like a hen hawk's when it had been balked of its prey. I could still hear her gabbling as I opened the door to the inventing shed and stepped in. My uncle was near the corrugated, very tall doors — they went up the full three stories of the shed — with just a few touches of light reaching him from the riverside windows. He was machining a small part, small enough so that he held it in his fingertips like an acorn, on one of the lathes. Through the years he had amassed a great deal of equipment, sometimes lashing it together from parts of tractors and once buying out part of a sawmill and a defunct metal works. That side of the shed, fronting the mystery behind it, looked cluttered, but even the clutter was neat, appeared to have some definite, deep-slung purpose.

I sat down in one of the split-bottom leather chairs under the window and started reading an old copy of *Amazing Stories*. He kept this kind of fare along with scientific journals and letters from other inventors, all higgledy-piggledy on a round dusty table.

This morning, when the buzz of his work had died out as he flipped off the lathe, he walked across to me and stood in the river-sun slanting in through the window for a moment. I looked up from my story, which dealt with monsters on a very obscure planet indeed, and in the radiation of the light over his face reflected from the river-water's running, I saw that he was staring up at the house. The Reverend A. B. Potter, my aunts' old friend and very manipulated crony, had stopped by for them in his Dort automobile. I saw them get in and heard the car move off churchward. "Mike," my uncle said, "sometimes people talk too much."

"Yes sir," I said. I supposed he meant what I was thinking: that, right now, my aunts would be filling the too-willing earholes of the Reverend Potter with woeful tales about my uncle's actions — by

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the time they all got to church. I thought, and without any evidence, they'd have made of Belinda Strite a scarlet woman. I knew, more or less, what a scarlet woman was; generally, they sounded like fun. I hoped they wouldn't have the extra, arrant guts to invite the Reverend to Sunday dinner. I didn't think in view of what my uncle had last said to them, that even they would have that much guts. No, they worked in stranger, subtler, much more niggling ways.

"I mean they talk about what they're doing. They lose it all in the talk," my uncle said. He was still gazing quietly out of the window. He put his hands in his hip pockets and wheeled around, his shadow casting over toward the high corrugated doors. "I've noted you're a pretty close-mouthed man for your age," he went on. "And it's kind of working in me to tell you what I've been doing all these years. I can't tell you much — give you the ins and outs of it — but I've a good notion to show you what it is. It's time I *did* show somebody, just to get it off my chest. I won't ask you to swear to silence, or any of those things — I think I know you well enough to know you *will* be silent."

After a second I nodded. I felt slightly awed, as though I were about to be initiated into the Woodmen of the World at a very early age.

"All right, Mike. I'll take that for a pledge. Mike —" He was walking over toward the doors now, which had four locks on then, in a big bunch, and several chains. "Mike, what you want to be when you're older? I mean, what do you want to *do*?"

"I guess be a poet," I said. I was on my feet, and following him. He'd talked to me honestly — which he'd never done less than — so it was up to me to be honest too. And he didn't flinch at the statement, as just about everybody else in town would have, but nodded as he hauled a batch of keys out of his hip pocket and started unlocking the corrugated doors' locks.

"Good. Be it, no matter how little encouragement, or none, or the wrong kind, you get. Just be it, and don't talk about it. That's about the only uncle-advice I guess I'll ever give you — except not to play five-card stud for big stakes. Well here we are."

With that, he'd taken the last lock off its hasp and was opening the doors. He opened them just enough for us to get in. And it was very dark, and metallic-smelling, inside — just one lance of light from the doors touching something that loomed in the center of the high room. He stepped aside, while I stood still, and I heard him fumbling with a couple of lanterns. Then two prongs of faint light

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fanned up behind a lantern glass, and then two more, and I felt one of the lanterns being pressed into a hand and took it. "Raise it up high and walk a little closer," he said in the near gloom which was now beginning to fill with corners of soft light.

I raised the lantern high above my head and again walked behind him. And then I could see. It was a long vessel, as high as the ceiling itself — outside, on the roof, I could hear sparrows hopping and twittering in the sun — and it had sleek sides, as though it were a mammoth Fourth of July rocket, with one great tube holding a nose cone and with the underside canted just a trifle on a long, thick stake. I couldn't tell what it was made of, in all, except that parts of it were burnished, and I thought of all the hours of labor that had gone into it through the years.

With all its purposeful appearance — its huge feeling of aiming somewhere, of being ready to go — it also had a lightly humorous look, as though it belonged to a Victorian time when scrolls were built just for the fun of it into porches, and jigsaws draped from cornices, and there was a lacy feeling to all of middle-class life. I said the mundane thing, "Golly," and then "Golly nez," but I put enough into it to make it ring and say at least something of what I felt.

"The freedom buggy," murmured my uncle, and this time it wasn't in easy answer to somebody who'd brought up the old chestnut; it was ripe and full of eagerness and being young and happiness of accomplishment. "I've got electric lights rigged around the ceiling, but we won't turn 'em on right now. Had to have 'em to work, all these years. She went hard at first, and there was a time I almost gave her up — last winter. But now I know she'll go, and act decently. Let me show you where you sit in her, Mike."

He was moving around and beneath the tube section and hoisting his lantern past the so-called stake. On the Fourth I had sometimes put rockets like this, but very small ones comparatively, into wooden two-sided chutes and aimed them at the stars, and lighted them cautiously, and stood back as they hissed and shot out of their beds making streams of bright pollenlike globes behind them, their trajectories marked against the warm clouds and flickering over the dark thick grasses and then the roofs of town. But I couldn't see anything like a visible motive power attached to the underside of this tube — only a little swing affair, even more Victorian-American than the rest of the instrument, like a summer-house or a porch glider; a swing

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with two neat seats in it, and a small table in front of it, with two plates balanced nicely on the top of the table. There was a short, easily accessible ladder leading to the swing seats; it was a temptation even as I stood there to mount up and sit down. "What makes it go?" I asked, still holding my breath so that my voice made hardly an echo in here.

"A lot of things, but mostly all I can tell you is, it's in balance right now and almost ready. I've got to add just a few dinguses; then she'll be set. The way you start her is just to sit down in the swing — then you lift the plates. That brings the table up, and it forms a kind of suction — well, I can't go into all that. I think she'll get fair and square to a certain star I've got in mind — I'm sure of that. From there on it's what the books call conjecture."

In the slightly swinging lantern-light — I could not hold my lantern steady; I was shaking a trifle in spite of myself at the hugeness of the whole concept — I could catch a glimpse of his eyes. They had coppery lights, and in them were reflected, as well, small images of this rocket, this buggy, this machine or whatever it was. All at once I had a vision of him — and someone else; possibly this Belinda, I thought — setting in the swing seats, lifting the plates — and then — and then —?

There are ideas that don't just sweep one, they stagger the bones.

He said, soft-voiced, "The whole roof rolls back, Mike. I built it that way when I put up the shed. Guess I've had something like this in mind, oh — ever since I was your age. The rollers on the roof'll be a little rusty, but I'll oil 'em this week. I'm planning to have the take-off next Sunday."

"The take-off?" I said, barely able to get it out.

"Well, the event. The going into the atmosphere. There's a lot of food in her — tucked up in her belly; you can't see from here. Hardtack, and barrels of water, and even a few barrels of dried apricots — plenty to sustain the journey. And a few books to read — improving books, such as the Bible, and *Two Thousand Parlor Games* — things I thought might come in handy on a long trip. I favor light relaxation for a trip of that distance. So I didn't include *Pilgrim's Progress.*"

"It's kind of heavy stuff," I agreed.

"And candles, and a few lamps and rope and a box of tools — everything's there. I planned it out kind of careful. Well, I've got to work on her now — so just remember, this is something we still don't talk about."

"No, sir," I said. "I swear."

"Good." I left him there,

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setting down the lantern, walking back into the front part of the shop where the windows smiled onto the river. My head was whirling like a pinwheel, and my soul was going like the rocket itself. When I glanced back, before stepping into the sunned chamber, he was climbing up the short ladder and affixing the small, newly machined part to some section of the rocket's struts. They were frail but strong-looking struts, built airily but with stoutness. I went over to the window and watched the water. Later, my uncle came out, cheerily, and relocked the four locks on the corrugated-iron doors and said gently that it was about time to go pick up Belinda Strite, and that he'd admired very much for me to meet her and that he hoped to heaven Freda and Allison were back from service now and had the dinner started, and that we'd better both go wash up.

It was a bad dinner; the food was of fair quality — though the fryers could have been younger — but there was a stiff pall over it from the start, through which Belinda, resplendent in the yellow dress which I've already mentioned and with her hair a living torch in the dining room — we used Great Grandmother Calvert's silver — and with her clear eyes taking in more than her straight tongue let fall, tried to break but could not break. For my aunts were on their tarnished metal, or mettle, and they were as acidulous as though both had taken lessons from wasps on their way home from church. And moreover, they'd had more brass than I gave them credit for; they'd asked the Reverend A. B. Potter to share the dinner, and his lengthy grace alone — lasting three and a half minutes by my Ingersoll pocket watch — was enough to have put a damper on any celebrant's spirit. My uncle tried desperately to keep up a front, to hold his face high in front of my aunts' attacks — but they bored in, and bored again, asking Belinda why she had chosen such a backwater as our town for her manifest talents, pinning her down as to her religious affiliation — she said that she didn't go to church often, it generally bored her and she thought God was pleasantly alive outside churches — and generally swooping down upon her and stinging. The Reverend Potter told Belinda he'd be calling on her to give her a few tracts concerning his church, and she smiled nicely and told him not to bother. The duel went on, but it was a sad one — outside lived all the free, open afternoon of real living, and here there was nothing but a narrow and, on my aunts' side, spitful tussle. And it was sad too, in my breastbone, the feeling

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that after the following Sunday I'd no doubt never see my uncle again. The only question was whether he would be able, in that short time, to convince Belinda to shoot off toward the sky with him. I kept all these calculations hidden behind the napkin tucked into my Sunday shirt.

After dinner — when the last piece of caramel pie was digesting — each of my aunts had three pieces — we played Flinch for a time, Belinda putting herself further into their evil graces by beating them four games running. Then it was suggested that we all go down to Lemon's, by my uncle. Amid sharp, not even half-veiled looks from Freda and Allison, and an uneasy feeling from the Reverend Potter which seemed even to extend to his bald, un-sun-polished head, we piled into my uncle's car and went to the pharmacy. Here my aunts tackled the sundaes with a great will, asking for extra peanut-scoops on top, while around them our conversation dwindled to less than talk — to mere spasms of noise, dried out in the fierce Arabia of their dislike. When my aunts, and I, had been deposited back at the house again and the Reverend Potter had tooled off in his Dort, my Aunt Freda announced to the stunning day, "I have a sick headache. Ally, he's going to marry that — that thing as sure as God made the earth and the waters under the earth."

"It's true, it's true," agreed Allison, and they dissolved in tears punctuated by plans which they didn't allow me to hear, but which would be blocking my uncle at every turn. To allay their grief and smooth their plan-making gears, they whipped up a light collation and ate it by themselves in the kitchen, while I mooned around the house and then went out to sit above the river and watch the sun turn red on it, envying my uncle and my aunt by themselves in the coming dark, trying not to think how sorely I would miss them when they had swept off toward the stars, and more, towards the individual star which my uncle had mentioned.

That fatal week my uncle's fingers, to my knowledge, never missed a letter, and his patter was as precise as ever as he riffled the mail and gave it to the eager early-comers in the post office. I wondered, now and then — it was spring vacation, and between times of racing through town with my friends and planning deviltry in gracious-shaded alleys, I made it a point to drop into the post office simply to see how he was doing — I wondered if silent excitement, the worst kind, was filling him as it was

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me; but if so, he didn't show a whit of it. When old Ike Fentriss, drunk as usual by the afternoon mail, fell off his bench and sprained his wrist and had to come into the post office to have it bound up and arnica put on, and revived enough to bring up the old wheeze, "How's the freedom buggy, Ross?" my uncle answered with the same degree of unlevity and level ease he always had.

Meantime, he spent every night, until late by town standards — sometimes after the twelve o'clock train had gone through to Napanee — with Belinda. By now my aunts had their faction — which regrettably, was all the "upright" part of own — on their side, and Mrs. Adams, one of their best cronies, made a point of remarking in front of my uncle that anybody with loose morals in a responsible government position ought to be investigated even if it took a letter to Washington to bring it about. I knew that my uncle was feeling the air freeze daily tighter around his ears, sometimes in earshot and sometimes not, and that he hated it. At Mac's, taking coffee, he was subjected to a lesser brand of persecution, but no less effective; there his cronies sympathized with him and Arban Sellers, from the bank, offered him some unsought-for advice. "Just let the affair kind of blow away, Ross," said Arban. "Not doing you any good, you know."

At which — I happened to be there — my uncle got up and walked out, the first time he'd ever left Mac's in a huff in his life, even when the coffee was three days old.

Midweek of that same bow-taut time, my uncle and Belinda invited me — not just to invite me, I thought, but because they wanted me — to go night fishing with them back of the millrace, and we did so, coming back late with a fair mess of catfish — which neither of my aunts would clean or cook the next day, so that I did it myself, following instructions in Dan Beard's Boy Scout Manual — and singing in the moonlight all the way. I envied my uncle both his rocket and his woman; she seemed to me as deft at talk and appearance as it was possible for a woman to be. I was growing lonely ahead of time, the loneliness would creep up over me in small waves until they filled me, when I thought of life without him, without her, when they would be gone — life ringed about by my aunts.

So we went beating through until the Sunday. On this day I stayed home, pleading throat-trouble — my Aunt Allison prepared a musterd plaster for me, which I ripped off and buried on the river hill as soon as she and Freda and Reverend Potter were

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out of sight. Against all odds, my uncle had again invited Belinda to dinner; now he was working back down in the inventing shed, and presently, above the ringing of church bells, came a rumbling from the shed roof, and I left my book and charged down the hill as the roof rolled open, open to nothing but the sky and a few rolling clouds. When I got inside the shed my uncle stood in the secret part of it, staring up. With sun spangling its flanks the great rocket looked more beautiful than it had even by lantern shine; a few bluejays squawked in the oaks leaning near the shed, and gazed in, marveling. He said, as though to himself, though he knew I was there as well, "I think about eight-thirty tonight — it'll be just the right positioning and time of year." Then he went back to calculating, using some cabalistic-looking personal tables he had handy, and after a while — long before my aunts and the ubiquitous Reverend Potter got back from church — he shut up the shed roof again. It moved on small devices like many roller skates, making a fair noise in the day; he had a system of chains and levers to seal or unseal the roof. When it came time to go get Belinda — and it proved to me how brave a woman she was, and how loving, that she'd deigned to go through this attrition of self again — I went along with him. On the way to her cottage on Water Street, I said nervously, "I'm not talking. I want you to know that. But I'm going to miss you."

"Why, Mike —" He turned to me. "I never thought of that."

"Well, you ought to."

"It's a nice thing to say, and I should have thought of it — of the way you'd be feeling. Now, you cheer up; maybe it'll be different from what you think."

"How can it be?" I said. "I don't want to keep you from going — I just feel kind of empty and hollowed out, that's all. But it's kind of like Admiral Peary's nephew complaining that he missed him when he went to the pole. If he had a nephew."

"You hang on, Mike. Just hang on. And I know you don't want to be — talking — I know it's just something you have to say."

"All right," I said.

Then we picked up Belinda; for a lady who might, for all I knew, be going to Mars or even Aldebaran in a few hours, I thought she was remarkably cool and self-possessed. Her green eyes held the full force of the beckoning daylight; she laid her head brazenly on my uncle's shoulder as we drove through town, and I thought, if she was scarlet, give me a scarlet woman every time, in preference to my aunts' various hues of fushia and puce.

Events of that afternoon —

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more deadly than they'd been before, because my aunts and the reverend had had a whole week to work up indignation in, and it seemed too that behind their glacial treatment of Belinda and my uncle lived the whole opinion of the righteous side of town — events of that afternoon aren't clear, detail by detail, except for the memory of struggling through it. The fryers were even tougher, it seemed to me, though everybody ate something. There were three kinds of cake, however; this was, probably, I thought, to further ram the knife home in Belinda, who had mentioned — among other defensive things — the week before that she didn't, especially, like to bake. Then there were the games; this time, Authors as well as Flinch, in which — it was that kind of afternoon — I kept drawing Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, when what I wanted was Mark Twain. But Belinda won finally and completely; it was as though my aunts were gazing at her through black veils, when the game was over.

"And now, I suppose, Lemon's," said my Aunt Freda. I could tell that even through her rediation of vital hatred, she was looking forward to two or three of Lemon's best sundaes. "Yes, Lemon's," chimed in my Aunt Allison, her lower lip shooting out as if in tasty anticipation.

"No, not today," said my uncle, as though the sideboard — of honest walnut — had spoken. And when they all sat up — except Belinda — to stare at him as if he'd just compounded the Albigensian Heresy, he went on quietly and in his chest: "I thought we'd just all take a walk down to the dock. Maybe sit in my shed down there and watch the moon come up. One of the prettiest nights of the year, don't think we ought to miss it — maybe even ought to prepare for it."

Struggling between a kind of seal-blaffing wonder at having finally been invited into his shed, actually into it, and indignation against the breaking of a fat tradition, my aunts stared at each other and then settled on Reverend Potter to stare at. "Why, yeees," Aunt Freda said finally. "Why, that might be nice — real nice —" But her eyes were also suspicious and asked to be shown. My Aunt Allison agreed also, in that grudging way; so the reverend went along with them, as was politic.

Then, gradually, the aunts fussing as they were helped down the steps to the yard and along the dock — they made it a point of never going out there, as though they considered it devil's country — and the Reverend Potter bravely helping them, elbow by elbow, and Belinda seeming to float and to give

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off a perfume that was like trees, like the attar of the night — then, gradually and at last, we were all in my uncle's inventing shed, in the latening light of the afternoon. Never had the river light looked more gracious than when it touched Belinda's hair. Never had it looked more stark and revealing as now, when it brought out the greed lines around my aunts' sagging-cornered mouths, which would not be wholly masked by their powder, no matter how much they used of it. It shone, just at a tangent and just the least, on the long, high corrugated doors which were locked behind us. And with my uncle talking much more — and fully — than I'd ever heard him do before, laughing a little sometimes in childhood reminiscences, as if all my aunts held for him was fondness, as if they had not controlled his life as rigidly as some kind of iron doors themselves — with all this, the afternoon waned and kingfishers dived into the slow-running, steady river and finally even my uncle's good talk was dwindling and the light was low in the room and the first stars shone in the river.

And my Aunt Freda broke the almost mellow mood like a mean and balloonless child bursting another's new balloon. "I'm peckish," she said. "We've got to have some nutriment or we can't stand up. I don't take it kindly, Roston Hatcher, keeping us down in this damp smelly place all afternoon — now —"

"Oh, I'll hike right up to the house and fix you some ice cream and sauce," said my uncle, quietly. But also as if he were happy and eager to go. "I'll prepare some for you too, Allison. I'll bring you ladles of it. You just stay there, now. Belinda, you and Mike come along and help carry —"

As he talked, he was sauntering, as if casually, back to the corrugated doors; as I watched he hauled out his keys and opened the locks there, leaving them open and hanging; then he flicked a switch beside the doors, and you could see just the lightest suggestion of illumination spray around the edges of the doors. I knew what that back-shed light was falling upon. My hair was almost on end. Then he said, solidly, "Come on, Mike," and, with Belinda, I followed him out and along the dock. It was very hard not to talk, then, as I looked back and saw both my aunts leaning forward, as if electrified, on fire with the need to go open the unlocked door and discover, once and for all, all about the freedom buggy — a chance which I'm sure they thought of as having been given them directly from the Lord.

But I didn't pluck at my uncle's arm, or cough, or stand on my

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head, or throw a fit. I followed him, and followed Belinda — when I looked back again, from the grass of the yard at the end of the dock slats, I could see my Aunt Freda's shadow, stretching long up the front room wall, as she stood and took one step toward the unlocked corrugated-iron doors. That I saw then, and no more for the time being; I was almost up to the house steps when it came to me that by climbing the elm next to the steps I could see even more. I climbed it fast, barking a shin; the door from the front room of the inventing shed gave off a yellow square of light onto the dock and the water. And now I saw two shadows walking to the corrugated door with its vast secret behind it. I had shinned down, just, when my uncle came down the house steps again, carrying a freezer of ice cream — behind him, Belinda brought plates and spoons and sauce — and then my uncle said, "This can wait," narrowing his eyes toward the inventing shed, and putting down the ice cream freezer, dasher and all, and starting to run. I was at his heels. He was just ahead of me, into the shed, and diving for a set of levers; then I heard the rumble of the roof — a polite roller-skating sound, or rain on steel — and, in the next second, I was following my uncle again as he dived for the corrugated doors and flung them a little open and plunged inside. I was just behind him. The Reverend A. B. Potter stood behind us in turn, chattering something, but it was not important, essential, or to any point at all.

I got one clear glimpse of my Aunt Freda and my Aunt Allison. They had climbed that easy ladder to the swing seats of the lovely rocket. They were sitting there. And my Aunt Allison — always slightly in the lead, but not much, when it came to reaching for a benison — my Aunt Allison, in the strong overhead lights, which flared up to the open sky, was reaching for the ice-cream sundae, a glittering affair with peanuts *and* a cherry on top, which sat on the right side of the table before her. As I watched, she lifted it, and my Aunt Freda started to pick up the duplicate sundae — they were perfectly prepared; they sat just where the plates had sat, the only other time I'd seen this apparatus — which beckoned in front of her, in turn.

There was a flash, a sort of quiet roar like a lion finding a chigger in its hide on an otherwise good day, and the underside of the tube folded up and raised the lacy, delicate, strongly made swing into the belly of the rocket's tube; in the next second a kind of Saint Elmo's fire played around the nose, far above us, and then the whole affair went up. It rose rather majestically.

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There were those who said they'd seen something, later; but even the Reverend Potter, an eyewitness, wasn't sure. The last I, personally, saw of the whole beautiful take-off was a light trail of frothlike dust, like little stars spreading and fading down to the river, small emulations of whatever star it had been that my uncle thought they were bound for. And then, for a second, the shape of the whole rocket — very like a Fourth of July rocket, very like a century-before-this express to somewhere — outlined against the spring moon.

My uncle's adam's apple was clearly outlined in his strong throat in the moonlight. Beside him, Belinda stared, and the line of her throat was a sweet and fluid curve. Finally he said, "Well, I surely hope she got the first bite."

After that the Reverend Potter broke down, a little, and we had to assist him homeward. Next week he preached of fiery chariots and revelations, I heard, and of course he was quite right. Next week there were mumblings and mutterings, as well, but my Uncle Ross insisted that he never did know quite what had happened, and put it down to a freak tornado. That night he and Belinda and I stayed up late, watching the sky — and singing, a little, from time to time. It was the same every day, and night, after that; and after Belinda and Uncle Ross were married and she came permanently to the house above the river, I'd sometimes drop in at the post office to watch his dextrous shuffling of the mail — and to wonder if he'd planned it that way all along, knowing who the freedom buggy was meant for, or if — but I never did ask him, and I also noted that as quickly as he read off the mail bulk to his willing customers, there was never a letter from Freda or Allison among them.

None of us, as far as I know, ever dropped into Lemon's again for Sunday ice cream, either. It would have seemed unkind.

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I recommend the above books, and had set out to tell you why in some detail. But there's a well-known series of critical dangers in dealing with "best" anthologies, and they caught up with me. "What do they mean by 'best,'?" I said to myself as so many others have, and "What they mean is, the 'best' novelettes and short stories they were able to find that someone else didn't have an option on," and so forth.

There's no lasting fun repeating someone else's lines, so I then cast about within my instinctive discontent, and found that I'd noticed a curious thing. All the stories are good — Wollheim and del Rey are excellent editors. But obviously "If This is Winnetka You Must be Judy," "The Bleeding Man," and "The Postponed Cure" cannot have derived from the same creative universe, or even from two. The Busby is as if from the mid-60s, the Strete is 1975 or maybe later, and the Nodvik finds its creative roots straight in the cabinet of Dr. Gernsback. Yet all are science fiction and among the best of a recent year.

I thought more. I thought about where we are and where we came from. Attached is a brief, clumsy version of my thoughts. Its purpose here is to equip you in my best

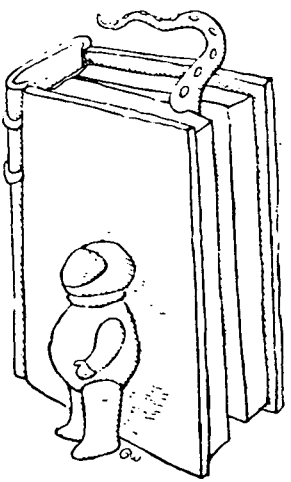
ALGIS BUDRYS

Books

Books not reviewed this month:

The 1975 Annual World's Best SF, Donald A. Wollheim, Ed. DAW Books, $1.50 paper.

Best Science Fiction Stories of the Year, Lester del Rey, Ed. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. $8.95 cloth.



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estimation with all the necessary tools for reviewing any such anthology yourself. Let's see what has historically been considered "best," and "most appropriate," and "typical."

There's a distinction between Theodore Sturgeon, author of "A Saucer of Loneliness," and Edward Bryant, author of "No. 2 Plain Tank Auxiliary Fill Structural Limit 17,605 Lbs. Fuel — PWA Spec. 522 Revised." It's not in the fact that the latter story isn't science fiction. Neither is the former. And there's a difference between Ray Bradbury and Harlan Ellison, despite the fact that each is the quintessential SF short story writer of his day. Other examples occur, but seem unnecessary at this time.

The short story played a vital, curious and complex role in mid-century "modern" science fiction, which can be said to have begun with the publication of John Campbell's "Twilight" in the late 1930s. In hindsight, this kind of SF can be seen to have lost its pre-eminence with the publication of Fritz Leiber's "Coming Attraction" in 1950, somewhat preceding such other portents as the magazine publication of Philip Jose Farmer's *The Lovers* and the simultaneous non-serialization of Asimov's *Pebble in the Sky*. There were signs of its coming before 1938, and many examples of it postdate 1950. So there were about 20 years of "modern" science fiction. But just as reveille was sounded by one short story, the appearance of another was the signal for the firing of the sunset gun.

"Modern" science fiction was so labeled for the public in 1947, when Raymond Healy and J. Francis "Mick" McComas, later one of this journal's founders, edited the definitive anthology *Adventures in Time and Space*. They codified and named a form that had been nothing but a pile of yellowing ephemera from garish periodicals. Groff Conklin reinforced them almost immediately with *The Best of Science Fiction*, *A Treasury of Science Fiction* and *Possible Worlds of Science Fiction*. Reginald Bretnor published *Modern Science Fiction*, a serious, weighty taxonomic study of the field, and that book signaled SF's availability as a fresh topic for serious academic study. It all happened nearly overnight, really, and "modern" science fiction was established as *the* science fiction, utterly different from monster movie or comic book writing.

Great and worthy consequences had followed from the masterstroke of (A) presenting evidence, in anthology form, that there *was*

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good reading, worthy of an educated person's time, to be found in the genre's past and thus to be expected in the future, and, (B), at least as important, giving it the distinctive "modern" label to set it apart from the "bad" reading undeniably to be found in the same place.

What it all was — "good" and "bad," "modern" and ... what? It often shared space in the same issue — was "newsstand science fiction." (My label). It was post-1925 American-originated short-length SF as distinguished from, among many other things, European technological social allegories in novel form, popular cautionary novels by such sterile cuckoos as Franz Werfel and Pat Frank, phenomenological studies such as George Stewart's *Earth Abides*, and even the vigorous British Apocalyptic or George Allen England school which would shortly produce the novels of "John Wyndham" and John Christopher's *No Blade of Grass* as outstanding contrasts to the embarrassing latter American Technosophist works of Philip Wylie.

Magazines do not normally publish novels. They publish condensations, or expanded novelettes, as "complete novels," and they publish "serials," which are three or four novelettes strung on a single plot, all but the ultimate episode reaching a partial and by definition incomplete climax. Now that there is a market for SF books, the SF magazines publish novels divided into parts by the word-length criteria of magazine make-up. But there are *no* "modern science fiction" novels.

I'm pretty sure that the first real novel by a "modern science fiction" writer was *Stranger in A Strange Land*, which seems to me to represent the culminating point of a long and proud evolution on the part of the man who wrote *Beyond This Horizon*, the pioneering "modern science fiction" serial, as well as *Sixth Column*, which very nearly fulfills all the possibilities of the form except those attended to by Hal Clement. But *Stranger* dates from 1961 and is not "modern" science fiction although its first half set out to be. It has founded its own sub-genre — of which the *Dune* series and *Dhalgren* are prominent members — which might be called evangelical science fiction. Think of that what you will, it represents the making of the first good link between the traditions and practices of newsstand SF with those of all the other — or "bookstore" — kinds, and Heinlein is a pioneer several times over again.

But we digress.

It's been said, earliest by Professor J. Gunn, that the novelette is the natural form of

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science fiction. He means newsstand SF, and within that frame he's obviously right. And yet .....

And yet, agreeing as we must, nevertheless let's look at the short story a little while.

In a thousand or five thousand words it's possible to so skillfully present a situation that its preceding events and inevitable consequences are made not only clear to the reader but integral to the story. It's possible to deal with large matters in small compass, and this is pretty much what the "mainstream" short story as presently defined attempts, I think.

The method is not unknown to science fiction or fantasy. But it's a capacious burden on the writer who also has to create the universe in which the situation occurs. Accordingly, most SF "short stories" at the high noon of newsstand SF, when there was most demand for the length but least recompense on a word/idea ratio, were in fact short fictions of other kinds. They were 19th century rustic anecdotes — "Well, Lefty and me was sittin' round in our shelter with our spaceboots off when in walks this angel" — or verbal setpieces on a par of technique cliche with Restoration comedy — "For you see, Admiral, your navigator has been blind since the first rayblast" — or expressions of what is called mood — *"Ah, no, no,"* Dormi Fai seemed to whisper in effortful accents. *"I am not permitted to be one of you, but how can I now return to being one of us?"*

Not all the possibilities of the first two kinds are ludicrous, or unyielding to assimilation by the ingenuities of talent. Most of Sturgeon's most poignant stories begin anecdotally, for instance, as a device for making his presence nearer and hence more convincing with regard to the unusually outre circumstances he is about to deploy. For what can be done with setpieces, see Fredric Brown and need look no further. But it's "mood" that identifies the "modern" SF short story — the famous Campbellian high whine of "Twilight," the whispering footsteps of robots on ancient parquet in the "City" series, the acceptance of symbolically transfigured death as the only immortality in "Requiem," the bereft narrator of "Helen O'Loy," and finally what may have been the most "modern" science fiction story of them all — "A Saucer of Loneliness," based on a true incident reported in *The Reader's Digest*, all its SF merely dressing ... not science, not technology, not speculation nor extrapolation nor fiction, but full of melancholy. It appeared in *Galaxy* hot from Sturgeon's typewriter; I don't know whether Campbell would have published it in

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Astounding, given the chance, but he certainly published "I Am Nothing," which is of highly similar creative origins and by a writer marginally less gifted than Sturgeon at Sturgeon's own game.

Alienation — the brooding melancholies of solitude, of Paradise glimpsed but barred, of arriving too late or too early, of foreign tongues and ways inexpertly grasped, of meanings only sensed — alienation is the great theme of "modern" science fiction. And well it should be, considered that when it was written ... when it was written, not when it was anthologized, and not when it was imitated for the market created by the anthologies ... it was written by people whom no one with a shred of common sense would have anything to do with, and published in magazines which obviously could not be openly purchased by anyone with a concern for public moral standing.

Obviously then, within the community of those in Coventry, alienation represented the bond of kinship, and empathy for the alien was the most noble emotion. Nobility — the obligation of the better-experienced, more competent individual toward younger, lesser spiritual kin — was of great concern to most "modern" SF writers. Now contrast that to the sense of "Coming Attraction," in which pity and sympathy are unsympathetic weaknesses in the fool whom God provides for the totally pragmatic survivor types. Leiber has always found higher frets than anyone else can until he points them out; he was also consciously out to tweak some aspects of "modern" SF at the time, although perhaps not quite *that* consciously or inclusively.

Whatever that case may actually be, there were obviously a lot of hitherto unsuspected possibilities in the good old instrument, and these were swiftly attacked and possessed by all sorts of enterprising persons who added them to their technical repertoires. This expanded SF to the point where "mood" writing — mood curiously equated with melancholy, despite the fact that no dictionary compells that interpretation — is far from the only serious kind, is a little old-fashioned and is becoming identified with a delimitable sub-genre of SF, with a beginning and end in time, and that end visibly in the past.

But noble melancholy — usually labeled mood, but sometimes "character insight" or "imagery," or any number of other things reflecting its essentially conventionalized character — acquired one deft and astonishingly likable spokesman just as the number of its days was about to be revealed. He

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was Theodore Sturgeon's apprentice, Ray Bradbury, and he found a home. He found in fact, two — *Planet Stories*, and the essentially identical *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* edited by non-fans Sam Merwin, Jr., and later Sam Mines.* Bradbury never sold to *Astounding*, hardly ever writes well at longer lengths — he's almost as poor a novelist as Stephen Vincent Benet was — and it doesn't matter. We are not sent born short story writers that often.

Up front, all those publications were obvious trash.

Planet Stories, for instance, always featured a "Complete Novel of Barbarian Worlds," usually by A. A. Craig burst from his disguise as Poul Anderson, and several "Novelets of Terror in the Stars," usually including *Empress of the Cyan Snake* or *Magenta Mistress of the Rim* by Emmett McDowell. *Startling Stories* always had a long science fantasy novelette, again of course a "novel," tending toward sword-and-sorcery, especially when by Leigh Brackett. After *Captain Future* fell victim to wartime paper shortages — and to the lowest sales figures in the stable — a Captain Future "novel" might lead *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, and if it didn't, then some other quick-fisted spacefarer took his place that month. All such publications always featured a metal-breasted valkyrie from the steno pool on the cover, subjected her to some sort of menace, and showed the hero charging on scene, blaster in hand.

These trappings were expressive of the publisher's opinion of his market, and thus of the magazine's ostensible editorial philosophy. It's a tribute to downright subversive shrewdness on the part of some authors, and to the actual good taste of several key editors, that this seemingly unredeemable junk gradually tended in the direction of, again, that treatment of alienation which we all knew was science fiction at its "best." This made that entire class of magazine particularly vulnerable just when TV began offering undiluted free junk to the audience for junk. Thus all those publications were wiped out swiftly in the early 1950s, but you can't make an omelette without getting egg on your face.

Be *that* as it may, in all these

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* *Whose assistant, Jerome Bixby, had been the best editor of* Planet Stories. *Bixby was instrumental in persuading Mines to publish* The Lovers, *and is the author of "It's a* Good *Day," an outstanding example of post-Modernist SF. He was Horace Gold's assistant at* Galaxy *and* Beyond *in a later incarnation. He also provided the central idea for the movie* Fantastic Voyage, *although Isaac Asimov novelized it. A generally unsung hero of our field. AJB*

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publications* one can find a curious duality between the front-of-the-book stories and the altogether different short material nestled into the narrow columns alongside the boilerplate ad for High John the Conqueror Root. It was another World back there, with stories in the Thrilling magazines like Will Jenkins's "De Profundis," or Theodore Sturgeon's "The Sky Was Full of Ships." The one of those, first of all, makes an *ab initio* allusion that ought to be incomprehensible to customers for mail-order trusses; the latter is only one of dozens of excellently written cautionary stories produced by SF at a time when technocratic know-how was scheduled to make all men bestriders of the stars by next Tuesday. "De Profundis" is also, as you might suspect, one of the most melancholic SF stories of alienation ever written. That's particularly relevant since to the same magazines "Murray Leinster" also contributed a number of highly ingenious lead novelets about clever people who save the world with devices flanged up from tomato cans and belt buckles.

To these magazines, Bradbury contributed a number of stories, to rising reader approbation. A complete collection of *Planet Stories*, however, is the place to go for the best recapitulation of Bradbury's philogeny.

His career there begins more or less with "Lazarus Come Forth," a nearly conventional snap-ending story, going on through "Mars Is Heaven" to what is thought of now as typically Bradburyesque writing in "Death-By-Rain" and "Zero Hour," to such obviously evocative and worthy tributes to Edgar Allen Poe or Thomas Wolfe as "Forever and The Earth," which is more of a eulogy and perhaps beyond the tastes of some of the readers.

That middle period — conventional pulp writing fully spurned, the merit of his new style heartily endorsed in the letter column and perhaps in the sales figures but more likely in the editor's personal approval, the interest in storytelling not yet intellectualized into a telling of anecdotes about storytelling — produced the stories later woven into *The Martian Chronicles*. Yes, folks, in this corner, lounging back against the ropes, *Magenta Mistress*. In the other corner, gritting gently, pink Mars.

It's interesting that up front A. A. Craig's Aresian thallasocrats

** I miss them. I miss Albert De Pina, Henry Hasse, Robertson Osborne, Gardner M. Fox, and Paul Payne. I miss the Vizigraph, I miss Wartears, I miss illustrations by Vestal and McWilliams and Donnel. Where are Sam Merwin's inept fanzine reviews today? Oh, God, just one more novelette from Vaseleos Garson! AJB*

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were stormrunning their beak-prowed war galleys through the straits of Trivium Charontis while in the back, wan, solitary chaps from Waukegan were wincing at the clatter of beer cans down the crumbling banks of dry canals. It's almost like the role Leinster played at Thrilling, but not quite. A somewhat different yin calls forth a corresponding yang.

In *Astounding*, to copper the point, the intense emotionalism of Bradbury short fiction was not required, for the Murray Leinster of the lead novelettes was not quite the same Will Jenkins, and the Anderson was by no description A. A. Craig. ASF lead fiction did not as readily substitute lust and violence for love and mortality, so ASF short fiction had a somewhat more reserved balancing character. It was in *Astounding*, which kept trying to become *Science Fiction* — and had every right, in the popular eye, to call itself *Modern Science Ficiton* but apparently never considered the attempt — that the melancholic tone sang its purest and noblest. In *Planet*, as represented by Bradbury, it was weepier. In the Thrilling books, it tended toward the bathetic.

But it was always there, whether in these named publications or in *Astonishing* or *Super Science* or *Future* or *Marvel* or *Dynamic* — I'd better stop; the heart can bear only so much. In essence, what was going on was that the fronts of all the magazines except *Astounding* derived from the great body of pulp smash-'em-up literature first exploited in the 19th century by E. Z. C. Judson as Ned Buntline, and so, too, did some of the backs of them; there was a lot of space to fill back there, and writers perfectly willing to fill it. But it became true sometime around 1939, and it became increasingly and increasingly true, that "modern" science fiction — alienation science fiction — crept into even the outright pulps by the back door. As well it should; a fair number of individuals who could never be overt formula writers were finding science fiction. You couldn't sell them on the need to conform to the old pulp formulas, on the necessity of following rigidly marked paths, or on codified values; resistance to all that was what had brought them out of the respectable community and into this underground haven. They *could* write just about anything, when they chose, and they took pride in bringing a little something extra to it, whatever it was. But they felt best and most at home with themselves, I think, when they spoke of loneliness.

Those who gathered around John Campbell — a man whose childhood featured an identical-twin mother-and-aunt pair who

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delighted in swapping clothes and deliberately confusing the boy as to which was which — had a right to feel they'd made it into the company of the elect, and could reach out avuncularly toward their younger counterparts, the readers they saw in their minds. Those who stayed elsewhere were doubly confirmed in any feelings that isolation and melancholy were universals, and that their inclusion in a story would swiftly make an offworldly character and setting believable to the reader. Perhaps those writers who do not consciously analyze every creative choice they make were most likely to make that one.

Bradbury is an interesting case — he's a one-and-a-half generation writer of alienation. Sturgeon, please believe, was treated despicably as an adolescent. To survive, he became swift, charming and narrative, as a comfort to himself and then to his readers. Bradbury, who spent years preparing himself by minutely studying every nuance and aspect of every Sturgeon story he could get his hands on, came along some ten years behind him. So that although Bradbury was no doubt treated despicably as an adolescent — most people are, if they select for those memories; some do not accept it as a normal part of growing up — he always had Sturgeon's stories to comfort him ... as did I, God knows, as did I, along with John's, and Will's, and Lester's and Cliff's, and so many others that (barely) got me through it.

Now, Sturgeon has always cut closer to the bone than most; few of his stories are laid particularly far away in time or space, and few of his aliens have funny outsides. It's not so much a faraway landscape washed by faerie seas as it is a sometimes unsmiling cartoon of the real world. Bradbury is the cartoonist *par excellence*, as Damon Knight pointed out long ago, and also, as in his Mexican cycle, exceeded even Sturgeon's unflagging attempts to use an accustomed SF style in "straight" stories. Unlike Sturgeon, he succeeded unreservedly and went on to establish two notions among the Publick General: (1), that Ray Bradbury is a hell of a writer, and (2) that although of course all those who stayed behind were less talented and perceptive, nevertheless there just might be *something* redeemable in the general body of sci-fi.

And now of course we are beyond the second and the two-and-one-halfth generation and solidly into the third since "Twilight," and the third since "Bianca's Hands," for that matter. A post-Modern SFnist like Ed Bryant writes of alienation from the

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standpoint of a practitioner in the most chic, most contemporaneously relevant field of literature that is. He has it under control so well, is so much a part of his time that, like Sturgeon with *his* audience, he doesn't always even have to supply the ostensibly essential element of extrapolation; the flesh — the flesh, no bones at all — is sufficient to be recognized and welcomed.

But the big pulling of SF into its contemporary pattern — the concern for "relevance," the unrelenting familiarity with such sites of horror and maltreatment as contemporary Las Vegas and Los Angeles, the clinical detail of degradation and the alien *actions* (not so much as the fantasiacal thoughts) of which humans are capable — occurred in the half-generation beyond the second generation. SF writers come in waves; there'll be very few new good ones for a while, and then Sheckley, Silverberg, Phil Dick, and a couple of other people will all arrive on the same day. Ten years will pass, and suddenly you've got Niven, Aldiss, Ballard, and Moorcock. A silence and then Disch, Russ, Malzberg; a few more years go by, and you've got McIntyre, Martin, and cetera. But in between you get these lone standouts, these people who run on their own clock. Stanley Weinbaum was one. Tom Sherred would have been one. Ray Bradbury is one. And Harlan Ellison, I think, learned not only from what had been written before him, but from the lives of writers before him, which was a new development.

I think he learned a lot from what happened to Bradbury. I think he combined that with all the strengths that spring from his inability to accept anyone else's view of the world at any given moment. And, like Bradbury, he's at his best when presenting his view in small and thus readily retainable formats; he's punchy, his thesis is

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always plain to see, and the remaining words in the story are freed for the purpose of building convincing atmosphere. His work isn't always good; it's nearly always memorable.

What's particularly his own invention, however, is his drive to multiply himself; to not merely write, but to attack the community at large with his own persona, and offer it the opportunity to take whatever benefits it can from the experience. He is a hard-voiced Bradbury, but more than that, he's a mobile archetype. In his assiduous campus proselytizing, first at Clarion and now everywhere, he is doing two things that were never fashionable before him but are firmly part of the tradition now. He has found and made popular the image of the radical SF writer, giving a number of succeeding writers a sense of their own special qualification. And he was and is at the forefront of the movement, reflected in the *Dangerous Visions* anthologies of short fiction, to bring to the public an entire body of literature as newly created by new people or by old people made new.

The field was ready for it. The central sense of what science fiction "is" had gone through enough generations to evolve toward it. Under the latest standards, what is best is not the alienation of the author allegorized within a fantastic story, but the alienation of the central character limned against a harshly "realistic" conventionalized picture either of the present or of a popularly recognized future such as an overpopulated world, or a politically stratified America, or even on occasion a world depopulated by war. The author is no longer a victim, not even in secret. The author is the expert. Having had the disease for a very long time, we must now beyond question possess the cure.

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Man Plus

(2nd of 3 parts)

by FREDERIK POHL

Synopsis of Part I: From every indication we could find, the world was getting ready to exterminate itself, and so it was time to move on. New People's Asia was squared off against the Australians in the Pacific, and nearer to home the cities of the United States were in a semi-permanent state of armed riot. The President of the United States studied our projections and ordered the creation of a Cyborg astronaut to become the first Martian: the first human being to be so structured that he could live comfortably on the surface of Mars. Willy Hartnett was chosen for the task, surgically deprived of all his unnecessary parts, mechanically supplied with new ones and trained to the use of his new body. Whereupon he died, unable to handle the new inputs.

The next man in line was Roger Torraway.

Roger was an astronaut of wide experience; he was also the husband of Dorrie Torraway, which caused certain complications, because she was widely experienced too. Among her inputs was one of the specialists helping to put the new Roger Torraway together, Alexander Bradley. What Brad did was to supervise the mediation apparatus inside the Cyborg system which interpreted the new sensory stimuli in ways that the human brain of the Cyborg could handle. Sensory stimuli were Brad's hobby, as well as his profession. Father Don Kayman, the Jesuit priest who was also the Project's chief specialist on Mars, also found himself doubly involved in what was going on at the Project headquarters in Tonka, Oklahoma. As a scientist, he was deeply involved in the task of making Roger's new sensorium and musculature work. As a priest and a friend, he was concerned about Roger Torraway as a human being. Don Kayman feared the relationship between Dorrie Torraway and Brad as a threat to the Project.

And so did we. After all, we had the survival of the race to consider.

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Chapter Eight

Through Deceitful Eyes

The weather had changed quickly and for good. We had seen the shift coming as a wedge of polar air pushed down out of Alberta as far as the Texas panhandle. Wind warnings had grounded the hovercars. Those of the project personnel who didn't have wheeled vehicles were forced to come by public transportation, and the parking lots were almost bare except for great ungainly knots of tumbleweed bouncing before the wind.

Not everyone had heeded the warnings, and there were the colds and flu bugs of the year's first real cold snap. Brad was laid up. Weidner was ambulatory, but not allowed near Roger for fear of infecting him with a trivial little illness that he was in no shape to handle. Most of the work of doing Roger was left to Jonathan Freeling, whose health was then guarded almost as jealously as Roger's own. Kathleen Doughty, indestructably tough old lady, was in Roger's room every hour, dropping cigarette ash and advice on the nurses. "Treat him like a *person*," she ordered. "And put some clothes on before you go home. You can show off your beautiful little butt any time; what you have to do now is keep from catching cold until we can spare you." The nurses did not resist her. They did their best, even Clara Bly, recalled from her honeymoon to fill in for the nurses on the sick list. They cared as much as Kathleen Doughty did, although it was hard to remember, looking down at the grotesque creature that was still named Roger Torraway, that he was in fact a human being, as capable of yearning and depression as themselves.

Roger was beginning to be more clearly conscious from time to time. Twenty hours and more each day he was out cold, or in a half-dreaming analgesic daze; but sometimes he recognized the people in the room with him, and sometimes even spoke coherently to them. Then we would put him out again.

"I wish I knew what he was feeling," said Clara Bly to her relief.

The other nurse looked down at the mask that was all there was left of his face, with the great wide eyes that had been fabricated for him. "Maybe you're better off it you don't," she said. "Go home, Clara."

Roger heard that; the oscilloscope traces showed it. By studying the telemetry we could form some notion of what was inside his mind. Often he was in pain, that was

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evident. But the pain was not a warning of something that needed attention or a spur to action. It was simply a fact of his life. He learned to expect it and to accept it when it happened. He was not conscious of much else that pertained to his own body. His body-knowledge senses had not yet come to deal with the reality of his new body. He did not know when his eyes, lungs, heart, ears, nose and skin were replaced or supplemented. He didn't know how to recognize the clues that might have given him information. The taste of blood and vomit at the back of his throat: how was he to know that that meant his lungs were gone? The blackness, the suppressed pain in the skull that was so unlike any other headache he had ever had: how could he tell what it meant, how could he distinguish between the removal of his entire optic system and the turning off of a light switch?

He realized dimly at one point that somewhen he had stopped smelling the familiar hospital aroma, scented odor-killer and disinfectant. When? He didn't know. All he knew was that there were no smells in his environment any more.

He could hear. With a sharpness of discrimination and a level of perception he had never experienced before, he could hear every word that was said in the room, in however low a whisper, and most of what happened in the adjoining rooms as well. He heard what people said, when he was conscious enough to hear at all. He understood the words. He could feel the good will of Kathleen Doughty and Jon Freeling, and he understood the worry and anger that underlay the voices of the deputy director and the general.

And above all, he could feel; he could feel pain.

There were so many different kinds of pain! There were all the aches of all the parts of his body. There was the healing of surgery, and the angry pulsing of tissues that had been bruised as major work was done. There were the endless little twinges as Freeling or the nurses jacked instrumentation into a thousand hurtful places on the surface of his body so that they could study the readings they gave.

And there was the deeper, internal pain that sometimes seemed physical, that came when he thought of Dorrie. Sometimes, when he was awake, he remembered to ask if she had been there or had called. He could not remember ever getting an answer.

And then one day he felt a searing new pain inside his head ... and realized it was light.

He was seeing again.

When the nurses realized that

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he could see them, they reported to Jon Freeling at once, who picked up the phone and called Brad. "Be right over," Brad said. "Keep him in the dark till I get there."

It took more than an hour for Brad to make the trip, and when he turned up he was clearly wobbly. He submitted to an antiseptic shower, an oral spray and the fitting of a surgical mask, and then, cautiously, he opened the door and entered Roger's room.

The voice from the bed said, "Who's there?" It was weak and quavering, but it was Roger's voice.

"Me. Brad." He fumbled along the side of the door until he found the light knob. "I'm going to turn the lights on a little bit, Roger. Tell me when you can see me."

"I can see you now," sighed the voice. "At least I guess it's you."

Brad arrested his hand. "The hell you can —" he began, and then he paused. "What do you mean, you see me? What do you see?"

"Well," whispered the voice, "I'm not sure about the face. That's just a sort of glow. But I can see your hands, and your head, they're bright, and I can make out your body and arms pretty well. A lot fainter, though — yeah, I can see your legs, too. But your face is funny. The middle of it is just a splotch."

Brad touched the surgical mask, comprehending. "Infra-red. You're seeing the heat. What else can you see, Roger?"

Silence from the bed for a moment. Then: "Well, there's a sort of square of light; I guess it's the door frame. I mostly just see the outline of it. And something pretty bright over against the wall, where I hear something too — the telemetry monitors? And I can see my own body, or at least I can see the sheet over me, with a sort of outline of my body on it."

Brad stared around the room. Even with time for dark adaptation he could see almost nothing; a polka-dot pattern of illuminated dials from the monitors, and a very faint seepage of light around the door behind him.

"You're doing fine, boy. All right, now hold on. I'm going to turn up the room lights a little bit. Maybe you can get along without them, but I can't, and neither can the nurses. Tell me what you feel."

Slowly he inched the dimmer dial around, an eighth of a turn, a bit more. The surround lights behind the moldings under the ceiling came alive, weakly at first, then a trifle stronger. Brad could see the shape on the bed now, first the glitter of the spread wings that had revolved forward, over the body of Roger Torraway, then the body itself, with a sheet draped over it waist high.

"I see you now," sighed Roger

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in his reedy voice. "It's a little different — I'm seeing color now, and you're not so bright."

Roger took his hand off the knob. "That's good enough for now." He leaned back against the wall giddily. "Sorry," he said. "I've got a cold or something. ... How about you, do you feel anything? I mean, any pain, anything like that?"

"Christ, Brad!"

"No, I mean connected with vision. Does the light hurt your — your eyes?"

"They're about the only thing that doesn't hurt," sighed Roger.

"Fine. I'm going to give you a little more light — about that much, okay? No trouble?"

"No."

Brad walked delicately over to the bed. "All right, I want you to try something. Can you, well, close your eyes? I mean, can you turn off the vision receptors?"

Pause. "I — don't think so."

"Well, you can, Rog. The capacity is built in, you'll just have to find it. Willy had a little trouble at first, but he got it. He said he just sort of fooled around, and then it happened."

"— Nothing. What muscle am I looking for?"

"Oh, hell Roger! It's called the *rectus oculi i lateralis,* and what good does that do you? Just fool around."

"Nothing."

"All right," sighed Brad. "Never mind for now. Keep on trying as often as you can, all right? You'll find how to do it."

"That's a comfort," whispered the resentful voice from the bed. "Hey, Brad? You're looking brighter."

"What do you mean, brighter?" Brad snapped.

"More bright. More light from your body."

"Yeah," said Brad, realizing that he was beginning to feel giddy again. "I think I may be running a temperature again. I'd better get out of here. This gauze, it's supposed to keep me from infecting you, but it's only reliable for fifteen minutes or so —"

"Before you go," whispered the voice insistently. "Do something for me. Turn off the lights again for a minute."

Brad shrugged and complied. "Yeah?"

He could hear the ungainly body shifting in the bed. "I'm just turning to get a better look," Roger reported. "Listen, Brad, what I wanted to ask you is, how are things working out? Am I going to make it?"

Brad paused for reflection. "I think so," he said honestly. "Everything's all right so far. I wouldn't crap you, Roger. This is all frontier stuff, and something

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could go wrong. But so far it doesn't look that way."

"Thanks. One other thing, Brad. Have you seen Dorrie lately?"

Pause. "No, Roger. Not for a week or so. I've been pretty sick, and when I wasn't sick I was damn busy."

"Yeah. Say, I guess you might as well leave the lights the way you had them so the nurses can find their way around."

Brad turned up the switch again. "I'll be in when I can. Practice trying to close your eyes, will you? And you've got a phone — call me any time you want to. I don't mean if anything goes wrong — I'll know about that if it happens, don't worry; I don't go to the toilet without leaving the number where I can be reached. I mean if you just want to talk."

"Thanks, Brad. So long."

At least the surgery was over — or, anyway, the worst of it. When Roger came to realize that he felt a kind of relief that was very precious to him, although there were still more unrelieved stresses in his mind than he wanted to handle.

Clara Bly cleaned him up and, against direct orders, brought him flowers to boost his morale. "You're a good kid," whispered Roger, turning his head to look at them.

"What do they look like to you?"

He tried to describe it. "Well, they're roses, but they're not red. Pale yellow? About the same color as your bracelet."

"That's orange." She finished whipping the new sheet over his legs. It billowed gently in the upthrust from the fluidized bed. "Want the bedpan?"

"For what?" he grumbled. He was into his third week of a low-residue diet, and his tenth day of controlled liquid intake. His excretory system had become, as Clara put it, mostly ornamental. "I'm allowed to get up anyway," he said, "so if anything does happen I can take care of it."

"Big man," Clara grinned, bundling up the dirty linen and leaving. Roger sat up and began again his investigation of the world around him. He studied the roses appraisingly. The great faceted eyes took in nearly an extra octave of radiation, which meant half a dozen colors Roger had never seen before from IR to UV; but he had no names for them, and the rainbow spectrum he had seen all his life had extended itself to cover them all. What seemed to him dark red was, he knew, low-level heat. But it was not true to say that it seemed to be red; it was only a different quality of light that had associations of warmth and well-being.

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Still, there was something very strange about the roses, and it was not the color.

He threw off the sheet and looked down at himself. The new skin was poreless, hairless and wrinkle-free. It looked more like a wetsuit than the flesh he had known all his life. Under it, he knew, was a whole new musculature, power-driven, but there was no visible trace of that.

Soon he would get up and walk, all by himself. He was not quite ready for that. He clicked on the TV set. The screen lit up with a dazzling array of dots, magenta and cyan and green; it took an effort of will for Roger to look at them and see three girls singing and weaving; his new eyes wanted to analyze the pattern into its components. He clicked stations and got a newscast. New People's Asia had sent three more nuclear subs on a "courtesy visit" to Australia. President Deshatine's press secretary said sternly that our allies in the Free World could count on us. All the Oklahoma football teams had lost. Roger clicked it off; he found himself getting a headache. Every time he shifted position, the lines seemed to slope off at an angle and there was a baffling bright flow from the back of the set. After the current was off he watched for some time the cathode tube's light failing and the glow from the back darkening and dimming. It was heat, he realized.

It was a strange feeling, being in the first place in an unfamiliar body and then trying to locate inside it a control that no one could quite define. Just in order to close the eyes! But Brad has assured him he could do it. Roger's feelings toward Brad were complex, and one component of them was pride; if Brad said it could be done by anyone, then it was going to be done by Roger.

Only it wasn't *being* done. He tried every combination of muscle squeezes and will he could think of, and nothing happened.

A sudden recollection hit him: years old, a memory from the days when he and Dorrie had first been married. No, not married, not yet; living together, he remembered, and trying to decide if they wanted to publicly join their lives. That was their massage-and-transcendental-meditation period, when they were exploring each other in all the ways that had ever occurred to either of them, and he remembered the smell of baby oil with a dash of musk added and the way they had laughed over the directions for the second chakra: "Take the air into your spleen and hold it, then breathe out as your hands glide up on either side of your partner's spine." But they had never been able to figure out where the spleen

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was, and Dorrie had been very funny, searching the private recesses of their bodies: "Is it there? There? Oh, Rog, look, you're not serious about this ...."

He felt a sudden interior pain swell giddyingly inside him and leaned back in desolation. *Dorrie!*

The door burst open.

Clara Bly flew in, bright eyes wide in her dark, pretty face. "Roger! What are you doing?"

He took a deep, slow breath before he spoke. "What's the matter?" He could hear the flatness in his own voice; it had little tone left, after what they had done to it.

"All your taps are jumping! I thought — I don't know what I thought, Roger. But whatever was happening, it was giving you trouble."

"Sorry, Clara." He watched as she hurried over to the monitors on the wall, studying them swiftly.

"They look a little better," she said grudgingly. "I guess it's all right. But what the hell were you doing to yourself?"

"Worrying," he said.

"About what?"

"Where my spleen is. Do you know?"

She stared at him thoughtfully for a moment before she replied. "It's under your lower ribs, on your left side. About where you think your heart is. A little lower down. Are you putting me on, Roger?"

"Well, kind of. I guess I was reminiscing about something I shouldn't have, Clara."

"Please don't do it any more!"

"I'll try." But the thought of Dorrie and Brad was still lurking there, right under the conscious layer of his mind. He offered: "One thing, I've been trying to close my eyes, and I can't."

She approached and touched his shoulder in friendly sympathy. "You'll do it, hon."

"Yeah."

"No, really. I was with Willy around this time, and he got pretty discouraged. But he made it. Anyway," she said, turning. "I'll take care of it for you for now. Lights-out time. You've got to be fresh as a daisy in the morning."

He said suspiciously, "What for?"

"Oh, not more cutting. That's over for a while. Didn't Brad tell you? Tomorrow they're going to hook you into the computer for all that mediation stuff. You're going to be a busy boy, Rog, so get some sleep." She turned off the light, and Brad watched as her dark face changed into a gentle glow that he thought of as peach.

Something occurred to him. "Clara? Do me a favor?"

She stopped with her hand on the door. "What's that, honey?"

"I want to ask you a question."

"So ask."

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He hesitated, wondering how to do what he wanted to do. "What I want to know," he said, working it out in his head as he went along, "is, let's see — oh, yes. What I want to know, Clara, is, when your husband and you are in bed making love, what different ways do you use?"

"Roger!" The brightness of her face suddenly went up half a decibel; he could see the tracing of veins under the skin as hot blood flooded through her veins.

He said, "I'm sorry, Clara. I guess — I guess lying here I get kind of horny. Forget I asked you, will you?"

She was silent for a moment. When she spoke her voice was a professional's, no longer a friend's: "Sure, Roger. It's okay. You just kind of caught me off guard. It's — well, it's all right, it's just that you never said anything like that to me before."

"I know. Sorry."

But he wasn't sorry, or not exactly.

He watched the door close behind her, and studied the rectangular tracing of light bleeding through from the hall outside. He was careful to keep his mind as calm as he could. He didn't want to start the monitors ringing alarm bells again.

But he wanted to think about something that was right on the borderline of the danger zone and that was how come the flush he had tricked onto Clara Bly's face looked so much like the sudden brightness that had come onto Brad's when he asked if Brad had been with Dorrie.

We were fully mobilized next morning, checking the circuits, cutting in the stand-bys, insuring that the automatic switchover relays were turned to intervene at the faintest flicker of a malfunction. Brad came in at six a.m., weak but clear-headed and ready to work. Weidner and Jon Freeling were only minutes after him, although the primary job for the day was all Brad's. They could not stay away. Kathleen Doughty was there, of course, as she had been at every step, not because her duty required it but because her heart did. "Don't give my boy a bad time," she growled over her cigarette. "He's going to need all the help he can get when I start on him next week."

Brad said, sounding every syllable: "Kathleen. I will do the god-damned best I can."

"Yeah. I know you will, Brad." She stubbed out the cigarette and immediately lit another. "I never had any children, and I guess Roger and Willy sort of filled in."

"Yeah," grunted Brad, no longer listening. He was not qualified, or allowed, to touch the

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3070 or any of the ancillary units. All he could do was watch while the technicians and the programmers did their job. When the third recheck had gone almost to completion without a glitch, he finally left the computer and took the elevator up three flights to Roger's room.

At the door he paused to breathe for a moment, then opened the door with a smile. "You're about ready to plug in, boy," he said. "Feel up to it?"

The insect eyes turned toward him. Roger's flat voice said, "I don't know what I'm supposed to feel. What I feel is mostly scared."

"Oh, there's nothing to be scared of. Today," Brad amended hastily, "all we're going to do is test out the mediation."

The bat wings shuddered and changed position. "Will that kill me?" asked the maddeningly monotone voice.

"Oh, come *on*, Roger!" Brad was suddenly angry.

"It's only a question," ticked the voice.

"It's a crappy question! Look, I know how you feel —"

"I doubt that."

Brad stopped and studied Roger's uncommunicative face. After a moment he said, "Let me go over it again. What I'm going to do is not kill you; it's to keep you alive. Sure, you're thinking of what happened to Willy. It isn't going to happen to you. You're going to be able to handle what happens — here, and on Mars, where it's important."

"It's important to me here," said Roger.

"Oh, for Christ's sake. When the system is all go, you'll only see or hear what you need, understand? Or what you want. You'll have a good deal of volitional control. You'll be able —"

"I can't even close my eyes yet, Brad."

"You will. Hey, Roger. What are you telling me? Do you want to put this off?"

"No."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I wish I knew, Brad. Get on with it."

We were all ready by then; the "go" lights had been flashing green for several minutes. Brad shrugged and morosely said to the duty nurse, "Let 'er rip."

There were ten hours, then, of phasing in the mediation circuits one by one, testing, adjusting, letting Roger try his new senses on projected Rorschach blots and Maxwell color wheels. For Roger the day raced by. His sense of time was unreliable. It was no longer regulated by everyman's built-in biological clocks but by his machine components; they slowed

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his perception of time down when there was no stress situation, speeded it up when needed. "Slow down," he begged, watching the nurses whiz past him like bullets. And then, when Brad, beginning to shake with fatigue, knocked over a tray of inks and crayons, to Roger the pieces seemed actually to float to the ground. He had no difficulty in catching two bottles of ink and the tray itself before they touched the floor.

When he came to think of it afterward, he realized that they were the pieces that might have spilled or broken. He had let the wax crayons fall free. In that fraction of a second of choice, he had chosen to catch the objects that needed catching and let the others go, without being aware of what he did.

Brad was highly pleased. "You're doing great, boy," he said, holding to the foot of the bed. "I'm going to take off now and get some sleep, but I'll be in to see you tomorrow after the surgery."

"Surgery? What surgery?"

"Oh," said Brad, "just a little touch-up. Nothing compared to what you've already had, believe me! From now on," he said turning to leave, "you're just about through being born, now all you have to do is grow up."

For the first time that day Roger was left alone. He experimented with his new senses. He could see that they might be very useful to him in survival situations. But they were also very confusing. All the tiny noises of everyday life were magnified. From the hall he could hear Brad's voice, talking to Jonny Freeling and the nurses going off duty. He knew that with the ears his mother had cultured for him in her womb he would not have been able to perceive even a whisper; now he could make out the words at will: "— local anesthetic, but I don't want to. I want him out. He's got enough trauma to deal with." That was Freeling, talking to Brad.

The lights were more brilliant than before. He tried to diminish the sensitivity of his vision, but nothing happened. What he really wanted, he thought, was a single Christmas-tree bulb. That was plenty of light; these floods of luminosity were disconcerting. Also, he observed, the lights were maddeningly rhythmical; he could perceive each pulse of the 60-Hertz current. Inside the fluorescent tubes he observed the writhing of a glowing snake of gas. Incandescent bulbs, on the other hand, were almost dark, except for the bright filaments at the center, which he could examine in detail. There was no sense of eyestrain, even looking at the brightest of lights.

He heard a new voice in the

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corridor and sharpened his hearing to listen: Clara Bly, just coming on duty for the evening shift. "How's the patient, Dr. Freeling?"

"Just fine. He seems rested. You didn't have to give him a sleepy pill last night?"

"No. He was fine. Kind of —," she giggled. "Kind of randy, though. He made a sort of a pass, which I never expected from Roger."

"Huh." There was a puzzled pause. "Well, that won't be a problem any more. I've got to check the readouts. Take care."

Roger thought he would have to be extra nice to Clara; it would not be hard to do, she was his favorite among the nurses. He lay back, listening to the rustle of his own black wings and the rhythmic sounds from the telemetry panels. He was very tired. It would be nice to sleep —

He sprang up. The lights had stopped! Then they were on again, as soon as he became aware of it.

He had learned to close his eyes!

Satisfied, Roger let himself sink back onto the gently flowing bed. It was true enough; he was learning.

They woke him to feed him and then to put him to sleep again for his last operation.

There was no anesthesia. "We're just going to turn you off," said Jon Freeling. "You won't feel a thing." And indeed he didn't. First he was wheeled into the surgery next door, intensive-care bottles, pipes, drains and all. He could not smell the smell of disinfectant, but he knew it was there; he could perceive the brightness gathered at the cusp of every metallic object, the heat from the sterilizer, like a sunburst against the wall.

And then Dr. Freeling ordered him out, and we complied. We depressed his sensory inputs one by one; to him it was as though the sounds grew fainter, the lights dimmer, the body touches more gentle. We dampened the pain inputs throughout all his new skin, extinguished them completely where Freeling's knife would cut and needle would pierce. There was a complex problem there. Many of the pain inputs were to be maintained after he recovered. He would have to have some warning system when he was free on the surface of Mars, something to tell him if he was being burned or torn or damaged; pain was the sharpest alarm we could give him. But for much of his body, pain was over. Once we extinguished the inputs, we programmed them out of his sensorium entirely.

Roger knew nothing of this.

Roger just went to sleep, and woke up again.

When he looked up he screamed.

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Freeling, leaning back and flexing his fingers, jumped and dropped his mask. "What's the matter?"

Roger said, "Jesus! For a minute there I saw — I don't know. Could it have been a dream? But I saw you all around me, looking down, and you looked like a bunch of ghouls. Skulls. Skeletons. Grinning at me! And then you were you again."

Freeling looked at Weidner and shrugged. "I think," he said, "that that's just your mediation circuits at work. You know? Translating what you see into something you can grasp immediately."

"I don't like it," Roger flared.

"Well, we'll have to talk to Brad about it. But honestly, Roger, I think that's the way it's supposed to be. I think it's like the computer took your sensations of fear and pain — you know, what everyone feels when he has an operation — and put them together with the visual stimulus: our faces, the masks, all that stuff. Interesting."

"I'm glad you find it interesting," Roger sulked.

But truthfully, he found it interesting too. When he was back in his own room he let his mind roam. He could not summon the fantasy-pictures at will. They came when they wanted to come, but they were not as fearsome as that first terrified glimpse of bare mandibles and hollow eye sockets. When Clara came in with a bedpan, and left again after he waved it away, he watched her through the closing door; and the shadow of the door became a cave entrance, and Clara Bly a cave bear growling irritably at him. She was still a little annoyed, he realized; some subsonic cue in her face was registering in his senses and being analyzed by the buzzing 3070 downstairs and displayed as a warning.

But when she came back she was wearing Dorrie's face. It melted away and reclothed itself in her familiar dark skin and bright eyes, not like Dorrie at all; but Roger took it as a sign that things were all right between them again ....

Between Clara and himself.

Not, he thought, between Dorrie and himself. He gazed at the phone by his bed. The vision circuits were permanently off at his request; he didn't want to call someone and forget what they might see. But he had not used it to call Dorrie at all. Often enough he reached out his hand for the phone, but every time he drew his hand back.

He didn't know what to say to her.

How do you ask your wife if she is sleeping with your best friend? You come right out and ask her, that's how, his gut feelings told

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Roger; but he could not, quite, make himself do it. He was not sure enough. He could not risk that accusation; he might be wrong.

He became aware that he was slipping into a state of mind that would surely ring the alarm bells on the telemetry readouts. He didn't want that. He resolutely took his mind away from his wife.

He practiced "closing his eyes" for a time; it was reassuring to be able to summon up this new skill when he wanted it. He could not have described, any better than Willy Hartnett had, what it was he did; but somehow he was able to reach the decision to stop receiving visual inputs, and somehow the circuitry inside his head and down in the 3070 room were able to convert that decision into blackness. He could even dim the light selectively. He could brighten it. He could, he discovered, filter out all but one band of wavelengths, or suppress one, or cause one or more of the rainbow colors to be brighter than the rest.

It was quite satisfying, really, although in time it cloyed. He wished he had lunch to look forward to, but there would be no lunch that day, partly because he had had an operation, partly because they were gradually deaccustoming him to eating. Over the next few weeks he would eat and drink less and less; by the time he was on Mars, he would really need to eat only about one square meal a month.

He flung back the sheet and gazed idly down at the artifact that his body had become.

A second later he shouted a great raw scream of fear and pain. The telemetry monitors all flashed blinding red. In the corridor outside, Clara Bly turned in midstep and dashed for his door. Back in Brad's bachelor apartment the warning bells went off a split second later, telling him of something urgent and serious that woke him out of an unsound, fatigued sleep.

When Clara opened the door she saw Roger, curled fetally on the bed, groaning in misery. One hand was cupping his groin, between his closed legs.

"Roger! What's the matter?"

The head lifted, and the insect eyes looked at her blindly. Roger did not stop the animal sounds that were coming from him, did not speak. He only lifted his hand.

There, between his legs, was nothing.

Nothing at all of penis, testicles, scrotum; nothing but the gleaming artificial flesh, with a transparent bandage over it, concealing the surgery lines. It was as if nothing had ever been there. Of the diagnostic signs of manhood ... nothing. The tiny little operation

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was over, and what was left was nothing at all.

Chapter Nine
Dash Visits a Bedside

Don Kayman didn't like the timing, but he had no choice; he had to visit his tailor. Unfortunately, his tailor was in Merritt Island, Florida, at the Atlantic Test Center.

He flew there worried and arrived worried. Not only at what had happened to Roger Torraway. That seemed to be under control, praise be to Divine Mercy, although Kayman couldn't help feeling that they had almost lost him and somebody had blundered badly in not preparing him for that last little bit of "minor cosmetic surgery."

The other thing he was fretting about was that he could not avoid the secret feeling of sin that seemed to be a realization that internally, in his heart of hearts, he wished the project *would* be blown. He had had a tearful hour with Sister Clotilda when the probability that he would go to Mars had firmed up into the cutting of orders. Should they marry first? No. No, on pragmatic, practical reasons: although there was not much doubt that both could ask for and receive the dispensation from Rome, there was also not much hope that it would come through in less than six months.

If only they had applied earlier ....

But they hadn't, and both of them knew that they were not willing to marry without it or even to go to bed together without the sacrament. "At least," said Clotilda toward the end, attempting to smile, "you won't have to worry about my being unfaithful to you. If I wouldn't break my vows for you I doubt I'd do it for any man."

"I wasn't worried," he said; but now, under the gleaming blue skies of Florida, staring up at the gantries that rose to reach for the fluffy white clouds, he was worrying. The Army colonel who had volunteered to show him around was aware that something was troubling Kayman, but he had no way of diagnosing the trouble.

"It's safe enough," he said, probing at random. "I wouldn't give a thought to the low-injection rendezvous orbit."

Kayman tore his attention away from his interior and said, "I promise you I wasn't. I don't even know what you mean."

"Oh. Well, it's just that we're putting your bird and the two support launches into a lower orbit than usual: two-twenty kilometers instead of four hundred. It's political, of course. I hate it when the bureaucrats tell us what we have to do, but this time it doesn't really make a difference."

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Kayman glanced at his watch. He still had an hour to kill before returning for his last fitting of Mars suit and spacesuit, and he was not anxious to spend it fretting. He judged accurately that the colonel was one of those happy folk who like to talk about nothing as much as their work, and that all he would need would be an occasional grunt to keep him explaining. He gave the grunt.

"Well, Father Kayman," said the colonel expansively, "we're giving you a big ship, you know. Too big to launch in one piece. So we're putting up three birds, and you'll meet in orbit — two-twenty by two-thirty-five, optimal, and I expect we'll be right on the money — and —"

Kayman nodded without really listening. He already knew the flight plan by heart; it was in the orders he had been given. The only open questions were who the other two occupants of the Mars bird would be, but it would only be a matter of days before that was decided. One would have to be a pilot to stay in orbit while the other three crowded into the Mars lander and went down to the surface of the planet. The fourth man should, ideally, be someone who could function as backup to pilot, areologist and Cyborg; but of course no such person existed. It was time to make the decision, though. The three human beings — the three *unaltered* human beings, he corrected himself — would not have Roger's capacity for surviving naked on the surface of Mars. They would have to have the same fittings he was going through now and then the final brush-up training in procedures that all of them would need, even Roger.

And launch time was only thirty-three days away.

The colonel had finished with the docking and reassembly maneuvers and was getting ready to outline the day-by-day calendar of events on all the long months to Mars.

"You've been very interesting, Colonel," Kayman said courteously. "I think it's time for me to get back, though."

The fitters were ready for him. "Just slip into this for size," grinned the physicotherapist member of the team. "Slipping into" the spacesuit was twenty minutes of hard work, even with the whole team helping. Kayman insisted on doing it himself. In the spacecraft he wouldn't have any more help than the rest of the crew, who would be busy with their own affairs; and in an emergency he wouldn't have any help at all. He wanted to be ready for any emergency. It took an hour, and another ten minutes to get out of it

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after they'd checked all the parameters and pronounced everything fine; and then there were all the other garments to try.

It was dark outside, a warm Florida autumn night, before he was finished. He looked at the row of vestments laid out on the worktables and grinned. He pointed to the comm-antenna fabric that dangled from one wrist, the radiation cloak for use in solar-flare conditions, the body garment that went under the suits themselves. "You've got me all fixed up. That's the maniple, there's the chasuble, that's my alb. Couple more pieces and I'd be all ready to say Mass." Actually he had included a complete set of vestments in his weight allotment — it had seriously depleted the available reserve for books, music tapes and pictures of Sister Clotilda. But he was not prepared to discuss that with these wordly people. He stretched and sighed. "Where's a good place to eat around here?" he asked. "A steak, or maybe some of that red snapper you people talk about — and then bed —"

The Air Force MP who had been standing by for two hours, glancing at his watch, stepped forward and spoke up. "Sorry, Father," he said. "You're wanted elsewhere right now, and you're due in, let's see, about twenty minutes."

"Due where? I've got a long flight tomorrow —"

"I'm sorry, sir. My orders are to bring you to the Ad Building at Patrick Air Force Base. I expect they'll tell you what it's all about then."

Grumbling, Kayman allowed himself to be led out, into a hoverjeep. The driver was in a hurry. He did not bother with the roads, but aimed the vehicle out toward the surf, judged his time and distance and skittered out onto the surface of the ocean between waves. Then he turned south and gunned it; they were doing at least eighty in ten seconds, and even on high-lift thrust, with ten feet of air between them and the average height of the water, the rolling, twisting chop from the waves corkscrewing under them had Kayman swallowing saliva and looking for a throw-up bag against a rather possible need in no time at all. He tried to get the corporal to slow down. "Sorry, sir." It was the MP's favorite expression, it seemed.

But they managed to reach the beach at Patrick before Kayman quite vomited, and back on land the driver slowed to reasonable speeds. Kayman tottered out and stood in the damp, lush night, until two more MPs, radio-alerted to his coming, saluted and escorted him inside a white stucco building.

Before ten minutes had elapsed,

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he was stripped to the skin and being searched and realized what high echelons he was moving in.

The President's jet touched down at Patrick at 0400 hours. Kayman had been dozing on a beach chair with a throw rug over his legs; he was skaken courteously awake and led to the boarding steps, while refueling tankers were topping off the wing tanks in peculiarly eerie silence. There was no conversation, no banging of bronze nozzles against aluminum filler caps, only the throbbing of the tank-truck's pumps.

Somebody very important was asleep. Kayman wished with all his heart that he was too. He was conducted to a recliner chair, strapped in and left; and even before his Wac hostess had left his side, the jet was picking its way to the takeoff strip.

He tried to doze, but while the jet was still climbing to cruise altitude the President's valet came back and said, "The President will see you now."

Sitting down and freshly shaved around his goatee, President Deshatine looked like a Gilbert Stuart painting of himself. He was at ease in a leather-backed chair, unfocused eyes peering out the window of the presidential jet while he listened to some sort of tape through an earplug. A full coffee cup was streaming next to his elbow, and an empty cup was waiting by the silver pot. Next to the cup was a slim box of purple leather embossed with a silver cross.

Dash didn't keep him waiting. He looked around, smiled, pulled the plug out of his ear and said, "Thank you for letting me kidnap you, Father Kayman. Sit down, please. Help yourself to coffee if you'd like it."

"Thanks." The valet sprang to pour and retired to stand behind Don Kayman. Kayman didn't look around; he knew that the valet would be watching every muscle tremor, and so he avoided sudden moves.

The President said, "I've been in so many time zones the last forty-eight hours that I've forgotten what the real world is like. Munich, Beirut, Rome. I picked up Vern Scanyon in Rome when I heard about the trouble with Roger Torraway. Scared the shit out of me, Father. You almost lost him, didn't you?"

Kayman said, "I'm an areologist, Mr. President. It was not my responsibility."

"Cut it out, Father. I'm not assigning blame; there's plenty to go around, if it comes to that. I want to know what happened."

"I'm sure General Scanyon could tell you more than I can, Mr. President," Kayman said stiffly.

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"If I wanted to settle for Vern's version," the President said patiently, "I wouldn't have stopped to pick you up. You were there. He wasn't. He was off in Rome at the Vatican Pacem in Excelsis Conference."

Kayman took a hasty sip from his coffee cup. "Well, it was close. I think he wasn't properly briefed for what was going to happen; because there was a flu epidemic, really. We were short of staff. Brad wasn't there."

"That has happened before," the President observed.

Kayman shrugged and did not pick up the lead. "They castrated him, Mr. President. What the sultans used to call a complete castration, penis and all. He doesn't need it, because there's so little consumable going into him that it all gets excreted anally; so it was just a vulnerable spot. There's no question it had to come off, Mr. President."

"What about the, what do you call it, prostatectomy? Was that a vulnerable spot too?"

"You really should ask one of the doctors about this, Mr. President," Kayman said defensively.

"I'm asking you. Scanyon said something about 'priest's disease,' and you're a priest."

Kayman grinned. "That's an old expression, from the days when all priests were celibate. But, yes, I can tell you about it; we talked about it a lot in the seminary. The prostate produces fluid, not much, a few drops a day. If a man doesn't have ejaculations; it mostly just passes out with the urine; but if he is sexually excited, there's more and it doesn't all pass out. It backs up, and the congestion leads to trouble."

"So they cut out his prostate."

"And implanted a steroid capsule, Mr. President. He won't become effeminate. Physically, he's now a complete self-contained eunuch, and —. Oh. I mean unit."

The President nodded. "That's what they call a Freudian slip."

Kayman shrugged.

"And if you think that way," the President pressed, "what the hell do you think Torraway thinks?"

"I know it's not easy for him, Mr. President."

"As I understand it," Dash went on, "you aren't just an areologist, Don, you're a marriage counselor, too. And not doing too well, right? That trampy little wife of his is giving our boy a hard time."

"Dorrie has a lot of problems."

"No, Dorrie has *one* problem. Same problem we all have. She's screwing up our Mars project, and we can't afford to have that happen. Can you straighten her out?"

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"No."

"Well, I don't mean make her a perfect person. Cut it out, Don! I mean can you get her to put his mind at rest, at least enough so he doesn't go into shock any more? Give him a kiss and a promise, send him a Valentine when he's on Mars — God knows Torraway doesn't expect any more than that. But he has a right to that much."

"I can try," said Kayman helplessly.

"And I'm going to have a few words with Brad," the President said grimly. "I've told you, I've told you all, *this project has to work*. I don't care about somebody's cold in the head or somebody else's hot pants, I want Torraway on Mars and I want him happy there."

The plane banked to change course away from the traffic around New Orleans, and a glint of morning sun shone up from the greasy oil-slick surface of the Gulf. The president squinted down at it angrily. "Let me tell you, Father Kayman, what I've been thinking. I've been thinking that Roger would be happier mourning over the death of his wife in a car smash than worrying about what she's doing when he's not around. I don't like thinking that way. But I have just so many options, Kayman, and I have to pick the one that's least bad. And now," he said, suddenly smiling, "I've got something for you, from His Holiness. It's a present; take a look at it."

Wondering, Kayman opened the purple box. It held a rosary, coiled on purple velvet inside the leather case. The Ave Marias were ivory, carved into rosebuds; the big Paternoster beads were chased crystal. "It has an interesting history," the President went on. "It was sent back to Ignatius Loyola from one of his missions in Japan, and then it was in South America for two hundred years with the, what do you call them? — the Reductions of Paraguay? It's a museum piece, really, but His Holiness wanted you to have it."

"I — I don't know what to say," Kayman managed.

"And it has his blessing." The President leaned back and suddenly looked a great deal older. "Pray with it, Father," he said. "I'm not a Catholic. I don't know how you feel about these things. But I want you to pray for Dorrie Torraway's getting her head straightened out enough to last her husband a while. And if that doesn't work, you'd better pray real hard, for all of us."

Back in the main cabin, Kayman strapped himself in his seat and willed himself asleep for the remaining hour or so of the flight to Tonka. Exhaustion triumphed over worry, and he drifted

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off. He was not the only one worried. We had not properly estimated the trauma Roger Torraway would receive from the loss of his genitals, and we had nearly lost him.

The malfunction was critical. It could not be risked again. We had already arranged for beefed-up psychiatric attendance on Roger, and in Rochester the backpack computer was being recircuited to monitor major psychic stress and react before Roger's slower human synapses could oscillate into convulsions.

The world situation was proceeding as predicted. New York City was of course in turmoil, the Near East was building up pressures past the safety valves, and New People's Asia was pouring out furious manifestoes denouncing the squid kill in the Pacific. The planet was rapidly reaching critical mass. Our projections were that the future of the race was questionable on Earth past another two years. We could not allow that. The Mars landing had to succeed.

When Roger came out of the haze after his seizure, he did not realize how close he had come to dying; he only realized that he had been wounded in all of his most sensitive parts. The feeling was desolation: wiped-out, hopeless desolation. He not only had lost Dorrie, he had lost his manhood. The pain was too extreme to be relieved by crying, even if he had been able to cry. It was the agony of the dentist's chair without anesthesia, so acute that it no longer felt like a warning but became merely a fact of the environment, something to be experienced and endured.

The door opened, and a new nurse came in. "Hi. I see you're awake."

She came over and laid warm fingers on his forehead. "I'm Sulie Carpenter," she said. "It's Susan Lee, really, but Sulie's what they call me." She withdrew her hand and smiled. "You'd think I'd know better than feeling for fever, wouldn't you? I already know what it is from the monitors, but I guess I'm an old-fashioned girl."

Torraway hardly heard her; he was preoccupied with seeing her. Was it a trick of his mediation circuits? Tall, green-eyed, dark-haired: she looked so very much like Dorrie that he tried changing the field of vision of his great insect eyes, zooming down on the pores in her slightly freckled skin, altering the color values, decreasing the sensitivity so that she seemed to fade into a twilight. No matter. She still looked like Dorrie.

She moved to scan the duplicate monitors at the side of the room. "You're doing real well, Colonel Torraway," she called over her

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shoulder. "I'm going to bring you your lunch in a little while. Anything you want now?"

He roused himself and sat up. "Nothing I can have," he said bitterly.

"Oh, no, Colonel!" Her eyes showed shock. "I mean — well, excuse me. I don't have any right to talk to you like that. But, dear lord, Colonel, if there's anybody in this world who can have anything he wants, you're it!"

"I wish I felt that way," he grumbled; but he was watching her closely, and, curiously, he did feel something — something he could not identify, but something which was not the pain that had overwhelmed him only moments before.

Sulie Carpenter glanced at her watch and then pulled up a chair. "You sound low, Colonel," she said sympathetically. "I guess all this is pretty hard to take."

He looked away from her, up where the great black wings were rippling slowly over his head. He said, "It has its bad parts, believe me. But I knew what I was getting into."

Sulie nodded. She said, "I had a bad time when my — my boy friend died. Of course, that's nothing like what you're doing. But in a way, maybe it was worse — you know, it was so *pointless*. One day we were fine and talking about getting married. The next day he came back from the doctor's and those headaches he'd been having turned out to be —" She took a deep breath. "Brain tumor. Malignant. He was dead three months later, and I just couldn't handle it. I had to get away from Oakland. I applied to be transferred here. Never thought I'd get it, but I guess they're still shorthanded from the flu —"

"I'm sorry," Roger said quickly.

She smiled. "It's all right," she said. "It's just that there was a big empty place in my life, and I'm really grateful I've got something to fill it here." She glanced again at her watch and jumped up. "The floor nurse'll be on my back," she said. "Now listen, really, is there anything I can get for you? Book? Music? You've got the world at your command, you know, including me."

"Not a thing," Roger said honestly. "Thanks anyway. How come you picked coming here?"

She looked at him thoughtfully, the corners of her lips curving very faintly. "Well," she said, "I knew something about the program here; I've been in aerospace medicine for ten years in California. And I knew who you were, Colonel Torraway. Knew! I used to have your picture on my wall when you were rescuing those Russians. You wouldn't believe the active role you played in some of my fantasies, Colonel Torraway, sir."

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She grinned and turned away, stopping at the door. "Do me a favor, will you?"

Roger was surprised. "Sure. What?"

"Well, I'd like a more recent picture. You know what security is like here. If I sneak in a camera, can I take a quick snapshot of you now? Just so I can have something to show my grandchildren, if I ever have any."

Roger protested, "They'll kill you if they catch you, Sulie."

She winked. "I'll take my chances, it's worth it. Thanks."

After she had gone Roger made an effort to go back to thinking about his castration and his cuckolding, but for some reason they seemed less overwhelming. Nor did he have a great deal of time. Sulie came in with a low-residue lunch, a smile and a promise to be back the following morning. Clara Bly gave him an enema, and then he lay wondering while three identical fair-mustached men came in and went over every inch of floor, wall and furniture with metal detectors and electronic mops. They were total strangers, and they stayed in the room, on new-brought chairs, silent and watching, while Brad came in.

Brad was looking not merely ill but seriously worried. "Hi, Roger," he said. "Jesus, you scared us. It's my fault; I should have been on tap, but this damn flu bug —"

"I survived," Roger said, studying Brad's rather ordinary face and wondering just why he wasn't feeling outrage and resentment.

"We're going to have to keep you pretty busy now," Brad began, dragging up a chair. "We've phased out some of your mediation circuits for the moment. When they're full in again, we're going to have to limit your sensory inputs — let you work up to handling a total environment a little at a time. And Kathleen's jumping to get you started on retraining — you know, learning how to use your muscles and all that." He glanced over at the three silent watchers. His expression, Roger thought, was suddenly full of fear.

"I guess I'm ready," Roger said.

"Oh, sure. I know you are," said Brad, surprised. "Haven't they been giving you updates on your readouts? You're functioning like a seventeen-jewel watch, Roger. All the surgery is over now. You've got everything you need." He sat back, studying Roger. "If I do say so," he grinned, "you're a work of art, Roger, and I'm the artist. I just wish I could see you on Mars. That's where you belong, boy."

One of the watchers cleared his throat. "It's getting toward that time, Dr. Bradley," he said.

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The worried look returned to Brad's face. "Coming right away. Take care, Rog. I'll be back to see you later."

He left, and the three government agents followed him, as Clara Bly came in and fussed around the room.

A mystery was suddenly clear. "Dash is coming to see me," Roger guessed. "When will he get here?"

"That part is a secret." Clara said. "From me, anyway."

But it did not stay a secret very long; within the hour, to an unheard but strongly felt *Hail to the Chief*, the President of the United States came into the room. With him was the same valet he had had on the presidential jet, but this time he was obviously not a valet, only a bodyguard.

"Marvelous to see you again," said the President, holding out his hand. He had never seen the revised and edited version of the astronaut before, and certainly the dully gleaming flesh, the great faceted eyes, the hovering wings must have looked strange, but what showed in the President's well-disciplined face was only friendship and pleasure. "I stopped off a little while ago to say hello to your good wife, Dorrie. I hope she's forgiven me for messing up her fingernail polish last month; I forgot to ask. But how are you feeling?"

How Roger was feeling was once again amazed at the thoroughness of the President's briefing, but what he said was "Fine, Mr. President."

The President inclined his head toward the bodyguard without looking at him. "John, have you got that little package for Colonel Torraway? It's something Dorrie asked me to bring over to you; you can open it when we've gone." The bodyguard placed a white-paper package on Roger's bedside table and slid a chair over for the President in almost the same motion, just as the President was preparing to sit down. "Roger," said the President, sharpening the creases in his Bermudas, "I know I can be honest with you. You're all we've got now, and we need you. The indices are looking worse every day. The Asians are spoiling for trouble, and I don't know how long I can keep from giving it to them. We have to get you to Mars, and you have to function when you get there. I can't overestimate the importance of it."

Roger said, "I think I understand that, sir."

"Well, in a way, I guess you do. But do you understand it in your gut? Do you really feel, deep down, that you're that one man, maybe two, in a generation who somehow or other gets himself in a position that's so important to the whole human race that even inside his

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own mind what happens to him doesn't measure up in importance? That's where you are, Roger. I know," the President went on sorrowfully, "that they've taken some mighty sacrificial liberties with your person. Didn't give you a chance to say yes, no or maybe. Didn't even tell you. It's a piss-poor way to treat any human being, let alone somebody who means as much as you do — and somebody who deserves as well as you do, too. I've kicked a bunch of asses around here about that. I'll be glad to kick a lot more. If you want it done, tell me. Any time. It's better if I do it than you — with those steel muscles they've given you, you might damage a few of those pretty behinds on the nurses past the point of repair.

"Roger," he said, "let me tell you my fantasy about what I think is in your mind. You're thinking, 'Here's old Dash, politician to the end, full of bullshit and promises, trying to trick me into pulling his chestnuts out of the fire. He'd say anything, he'd promise anything. All he wants is what he can get out of me.' Anywhere near right, so far?"

"Why — no, Mr. President! Well ... a little bit."

The President nodded. "You'd be crazy if you didn't think a little bit of that," he said matter-of-factly. "It's all true, you know. Up to a point. It's true I'd promise you anything, tell you any lies I could think of to get you to Mars. But the other thing that's true is that you have us all by the genital organs, Roger. We *need* you. There's a war coming if we don't do something to stop it, and it's crazy but the trend projections say the only thing that can stop it is putting you on Mars. Don't ask me why. I just go by what the technical people tell me, and they claim that's what the computers print out."

Roger's wings were stirring restlessly, but the eyes were intent on the President.

"So you see," said the President heavily. "I'm appointing myself your hired hand, Roger. You tell me what you want. I'll make damn sure you get it. You pick up that phone any time, day or night. They'll put you through to me. If I'm asleep, you can wake me if you want to. If it can wait, you can leave a message. There's going to be no more fucking you around in this place, and if you even think it's happening, you tell me and I'll stop it. Christ," he said, grinning as he started to stand up, "do you know what the history books are going to say about me? 'Fitz-James Deshatine, 1943-2026, forty-second President of the United States. During his administration the human race established its first self-sustaining colony on another planet.' That's

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what I'll get, Roger, if I get that much — and you're the only one who can give it to me.

"Well," he said, moving toward the door, "there's a governor's conference waiting for me in Palm Springs. They expected me six hours ago, but I figured you mattered a hell of a lot more than they did. Kiss Dorrie for me. And call me. If you don't have anything to complain about, call me to say hello. Any time."

And he left, with a dazzled astronaut staring after him.

Take it any way you liked, Roger reflected, it was really a pretty spectacular performance, and it left him feeling both awed and pleased. Subtracting ninety-nine per cent of it as bullshit, what was left was highly gratifying.

Roger leaned back and folded his hands on his chest. Things were turning out rather interestingly. He had not forgotten the internal pain of the discovery of his castration, and he had not put Dorrie out of his mind. But neither was perceived as pain any more. There were too many newer, more pleasant thoughts overlaying them.

Thinking of Dorrie reminded him of the present. He opened it. It was a ceramic cup in harvest colors, ornamented with a cornucopia of fruits. The card said, "This is a way of telling you that I love you." And it was signed *Dorrie.*

All of Torraway's signs were stable now, and we were getting ready to phase in the mediation circuits.

This time Roger was well briefed. Brad was with him every hour — after taking a large share of the President's ass-kicking, chastened and diligent. We deployed one task force to oversee the phasing-in of the mediation circuits, another to buffer the readout/read-in of data from the 3070 in Tonka to the new backpack computer in Rochester, New York. Texas and Oklahoma were going through one of their periodic brownouts just then, which complicated all machine data handling, and the after effects of the flu were still with the human beings on the staff. We were definitely short-handed.

Moreover we needed still more. The backpack computer was rated at 99 and nine nines per cent reliable in every component, but there were something like 10^8 components. There was a lot of backup, and a full panoply of cross-input pathes so that failure of even three or four major subsystems would leave enough capacity to keep Roger going. But that wasn't good enough. Analysis showed that there was one chance in ten of critical-path failure within half a Martian year.

So the decision was made to construct, launch and orbit around

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Mars a full-size 3070, replicating all the functions of the backpack computer in triplicate. It would not be as good as the backpack. If the backpack experienced total failure, Roger would have the use of the orbiter only fifty per cent of the time — when it was above the horizon in its orbit, and thus could interlink with him by radio. There would be a worst-case lag of a hundredth of a second, which was tolerable. Also, he would have to stay in the open, or linked with an external antenna otherwise.

There was another reason for the backup orbiter, and that was the high risk of glitches. Both the orbiting 3070 and the backpack were heavily shielded. Nevertheless they would pass through the Van Allen belts at launch, and the solar wind all through their flight. By the time they got to the vicinity of Mars, the solar wind would be at a low enough level to be bearable — except in the case of flares. The charged particles of a flare could easily bug enough of the stored data in either computer to critically damage its function. The backpack computer would be helpless to defend itself. The 3070, on the other hand, had enough reserve capacity for continuous internal monitoring and repair. In idle moments — and it would have many idle moments, as much as 99 per cent of its function time even when in use by Roger — it would compare data in each of its triplicate arrays. If any datum differed from the same datum in the other arrays, it would check for compatibility with the surround data; if all data were compatible, it would examine all three arrays and make the one aberrant bit conform with the other two. If two did not conform, it would check against the backpack if possible.

That was all the redundancy we could afford, but it was quite a lot. On the whole, we were very pleased.

To be sure, the orbiting 3070 would require a good deal of power. We calculated the probable maximum draw against the probable worst-case supply of any reasonable set of solar panels, and we concluded that the margin was too thin. So Raytheon got a pre-empt order for one of its MHD generators, and crews went to work on Route 128 to modify it for space launch and automatic operation in orbit around Mars. When the 3070 and the MHD generator arrived in orbit, they would lock to each other. The generator would supply all the power the computer needed and have enough left over to microwave a useful surplus down to Roger on the surface of Mars, which he could use both to power his own machine parts as needed or for whatever power-using equipment he might like to install.

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Once we had completed all the plans, we could hardly see how we had thought we could get along without them in the first place. Those were happy days! We requested, and were promptly given, all the reinforcements we needed. Tulsa went without lights two nights a week so we could have the energy reserves we needed, and Jet Propulsion Laboratories lost their entire space-medicine staff to our project.

The read in of data proceeded. Glitches chased themselves merrily around both new computers, the backpack in Rochester and the duplicate 3070 that had been rushed to Merrict Island. But we hunted them down, isolated them, corrected them and were keeping right on schedule.

The world outside, of course, was not as pleasant.

Welsh nationalists with a home-made plutonium bomb, made out of materials hijacked from the breeder reactor at Carmarthen, had blown up the Hyde Park Barracks and most of Knightsbridge. In California the Cascade Mountains were burning out of control, the fire-fighting helicopters grounded because of the fuel shortage. An exploding epidemic of smallpox had depopulated Poona, was already out of control in Bombay, and cases were being reported from Madras to Delhi as those who were able fled the plague. The Australians had declared Condition Red mobilization, the NPA had called for an emergency meeting of the Security Council, and Capetown was under siege.

All of this was as the graphs had predicted. We were aware of all of it. We continued with our work. When one of the nurses or technicians took time to worry, he had the President's orders to reassure him. On every bulletin board and placarded in most of the workrooms was a quote from Dash:

> You take care of Roger Torraway, and I'll take care of the rest of the world.
>
> Fitz-James Deshatiné

We didn't need the reassurance, we knew how important the work was. The survival of our race depended on it. Compared to that, nothing else mattered.

Roger woke up in total blackness.

He had been dreaming, and for a moment the dream and the reality were queerly fused. The dream had been of a long time ago, when he and Dorrie and Brad had driven down to Lake Texoma with a few friends who owned a sailboat, and in the evening they had sung to Brad's guitar while the huge moon rose over the water. He thought he heard Brad's voice again ... but he

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listened more closely, his brain clearing from sleep, and there was nothing.

He moved restlessly and discovered he was tethered to the bed.

For a moment terror flooded through his mind: trapped, helpless, alone. Had they turned him off? Were his senses deliberately blacked out? What was happening?

A small voice near his ear spoke again: "Roger? This is Brad. Your readouts say you're awake."

The relief was overpowering. "Yes," he managed. "What's going on?"

"We've got you in sensory-deprivation environment. Apart from my voice, can you hear anything?"

"Not a sound," said Roger. "Not *anything*."

"How about light?"

Roger reported the dim heat glow. "That's all."

"Fine," said Brad. "Now, here's the thing, Roger. We're going to let you work in your new sensorium a little bit at a time. Simple sounds. Simple patterns. We've got a slide projector through the wall over the head of your bed, and a screen by the door — you can't see it, of course, but it's there. What we're going to do — wait a minute. Kathleen's determined to talk to you."

Faint friction sounds and scuffles, and then Kathleen Doughty's voice: "Roger, this shithead forgot one important thing. Sensory deprivation's dangerous, you know that."

"I've heard it," Roger admitted.

"According to the experts the worst part of it is feeling impotent to end it. So any time you begin to feel bad, just talk; one of us will always be here, and we'll answer. It'll be Brad, or me, or Sulie Carpenter, or Clara."

"Are you all there right now?"

"Christ, yes — plus Don Kayman and General Scanyon and, cripes, half the staff. You won't lack for company, Roger. I promise you that. Now. What about my voice, is that giving you any trouble?"

He thought. "Not that I notice. You do sound a little bit like a creaking door," he evaluated.

"That's bad?"

"I don't think so. You sound kind of that way all the time, Kathleen."

Brad cut in. "Now, what we're going to do is give you pure, simple visual inputs to deal with. As Kathleen says, you can speak to us any time and we'll answer if you want us to. But we won't speak much for a while. Let the visual circuits work themselves in before we confuse things with simultaneous sight and sound, got it?"

"Go ahead," said Roger.

There was no answer, but in a moment a pale point of light

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appeared against the far wall.

It was not bright. With the eyes he had been born with, Roger suspected, he would not have been able to see it at all; as it was, he could make it out clearly, and even in the filtered air of his hospital room he could make out the faint path of light from projector to wall over his head.

Nothing else happened for a long time.

Roger waited as patiently as he could.

More time passed.

Finally he said, "All right, I see it. It's a dot. I've been watching it all along, and it's still just a dot. I do observe," he said, turning his head about, "that there's enough reflected light from it that I can see the rest of the room a little bit, but that's all."

When Brad's voice came it sounded like thunder: "Okay, Roger, hold on and we'll give you something else."

"Wow!" Roger said. "Not so loud, okay?"

"I wasn't any louder than before," Brad objected. And, in fact, his voice had reduced itself to normal proportions.

"Okay, okay," Roger muttered. He was getting bored. After a moment another point of light appeared, a few inches from the first one. Both held for another long time, and then a line of light leaped into being between them.

"This is pretty dull," he complained.

"It's meant to be." It was Clara Bly's voice this time.

"Hi," Roger greeted her. "Listen. I can see pretty well now, in all this light you're giving me. What are all these wires sticking into me?"

Brad cut in: "They're your telemetry, Roger. That's why we had to tie you down, so you wouldn't roll over and mess up the leads. Everything's on remote now, you know. We had to take almost everything out of your room."

"So I noticed. All right, go ahead."

But it was tedious and remained tedious. These were not the kind of things that were calculated to keep one's mind busy. They might be important. They were also dull. After an interminable stretch of simple geometric figures of light, the intensity reduced so that there was less and less spill of reflection to illuminate the rest of the room, they began feeding him sounds: clicks, oscillator beeps, a chime, a hiss of white noise.

In the room outside, the shifts kept changing. They stopped only when the telemetry indicated Roger needed sleep, or food, or a bedpan. None of those needs were frequent. Roger began to be able to tell who was on duty from the tiniest of

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signs: the faintly mocking note in Brad's voice that was only there when Kathleen Doughty was in the room, the slower, somehow more affectionate chirping of the sound tapes when Sulie Carpenter was monitoring the responses. He discovered that his time sense was not the same as that of those outside, or of "reality," whatever that was. "That's to be expected, Rog," said the weary voice of Brad when he reported it. "If you work at it, you'll find you can exercise volitional control over that. You can count out seconds like a metronome if you want to. Or move faster or slower, depending on what's needed."

"How do I do that?" Roger demanded.

"Hell, man!" Brad flared. "It's your body, learn to use it." Then, apologetically: "The same way you learned to block off vision. Experiment till you figure it out."

Somehow the time passed.

But not easily, and not quickly. There were long periods when Roger's altered time sense contrarily dragged his tedium out, times when, against his will, he found himself thinking again about Dorrie. The lift that Dash's visit had given him, the pleasant concern and affection from Sulie Carpenter — these were good things; but they did not last forever. Dorrie was a reality of his reverie, and when his mind was empty enough to wander, it was to Dorrie that it wandered. Dorrie and their joyous early years together. Dorrie, and the terrible knowledge that he was no longer enough of a man to gratify her sexual needs. Dorrie and Brad ....

Kathleen Doughty's voice snapped: "I don't know what the hell you're doing, Roger, but it's screwing up your vital signs! Cut it out."

"All right," he grumbled. He put Dorrie out of his mind. He thought of Kathleen's rancorous, affectionate voice, of what the President had said, of Sulie Carpenter. He made himself tranquil.

As a reward they showed him a slide of a bunch of violets, in full color.

Chapter Ten

The Batman's Entrechats

Suddenly, amazingly, there were only nine days left.

Outside the clerical condominium Father Kayman shivered in the cold, waiting for his ride to the project. The fuel shortage had worsened a great deal in the past two weeks, with the fighting in the Middle East and the Scottish Freedom Fighters blowing up the

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North Sea pipelines. The project itself had overriding priorities for whatever it needed, even though some of the missile silos had not enough fuel for topping off their birds; but all the staff had been urged to turn off lights, share rides, turn down their home thermostats, watch less TV.

Brad beeped his horn, and Kayman jumped.

"Sorry," he said, getting in and closing the door. "Say, shouldn't we take my car next time? Uses a lot less fuel than this thing of yours."

Brad shrugged morosely and peered into his rearview mirror. Another hovercar, this one a light, fast sports job, was swinging around the corner after them. "I drive for two anyway," he said. "That's the same one that was tailing me on Tuesday. They're getting sloppy. Or else they want to make sure I know I'm being followed."

Kayman looked over his shoulder. The following car was certainly taking no pains to be inconspicuous. "Do you know who it is, Brad?"

"Is there any doubt?"

Kayman didn't answer. Actually, there wasn't. The President had made it clear to Brad that he was not under any circumstances to fool around the monster's wife, in a half-hour interview of which Brad vividly recalled every painful second. The shadowing had begun immediately thereafter, to make sure Brad didn't forget.

But it was not a subject that Kayman wanted to discuss with Brad. He turned on the radio, tuned to a news broadcast. They listened for a few minutes of censored but still-overpowering disaster until Brad wordlessly reached out and snapped it off. Then they rode in silence, under the leaden sky, until they reached the great white cube of the project, alone on the desolate prairie.

Inside there was nothing gray; the lights were strong and glaring, the faces were tired, sometimes concerned, but they were alive. In here at least, Kayman thought, there was a sense of accomplishment and purpose. The project was right on schedule.

And in nine days the Mars craft would be launched, and he himself would be on it.

He felt unready. He felt the world was unready for this venture. It all seemed so curiously impromptu, in spite of the eternities of work that they had put in, himself included. Even the crew was not finally decided. Roger would go; he was the raison d'etre of the whole project, of course. Kayman would go, that had been decided firmly. But the two pilots were still only provisional. Dash, for Dash's own

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reasons, had reserved the right of final decision to himself, and he was withholding his hand.

The one thing that seemed fully ready for the venture was the link in the chain that had once seemed most doubtful, Roger himself.

The training had gone beautifully. Roger was fully mobile now, all over the project building, commuting from the room he still kept as "home" to the Mars-normal tank, to the test facilities, to any place he cared to go. The whole project was used to seeing the tall black-winged creature loping down a hall, the huge, faceted eyes recognizing a face and the flat voice calling a cheery greeting. The last week and more had been all Kathleen Doughty's. His sensorium appeared under perfect control; now it was time to learn to exploit all the resources of his musculature. So she had brought in a blind man, a ballet dancer, and a former paraplegic; and as Roger began to expand his horizons, they took over his tutorial tasks. The ballet dancer was past stardom now, but he had known it, and as a child he had studied with Nuryev and Dolin. The blind man was no longer blind. He had no eyes, but his optic system had been replaced with sensors very like Roger's own, and the two of them compared notes over subtle hues and tricks of manipulating the parameters of their vision. The paraplegic, who now moved on motorized limbs that were precursors of Roger's, had had a year to learn to use them, and he and Roger took ballet classes together.

Not always physically together, not quite. The ex-paraplegic, whose name was Alfred, was still far more human than Roger Torraway, and among other human traits he possessed was a need for air. As Kayman and Brad came into the control chamber for the Mars-normal tank, Alfred was doing entrechats on one side of the great double glass pane and Roger, inside the almost airless tank, was duplicating his moves on the other. Kathleen Doughty was counting cadence, and the loud-speaker system was playing the A-major waltz from *Les Sylphides*. Vern Scanyon was sitting over by a wall on a reversed chair, hands clasped over the back of the chair and chin resting on his hands. Brad went over to him at once, and the two of them began to talk inaudibly.

Don Kayman found a place to sit near the door and for some reason felt ill at ease. Then he remembered: this was just where he had been sitting when Willy Hartnett had died before his eyes.

It seemed so long ago. It had only been a week since Brenda Hartnett had brought the kids around to say good-by to him and Sister Clotilda, but she had almost

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dropped out of their minds already. The monster named Roger was the star of the show now. The death of another monster in that place, so short a time ago, was only history.

Kayman took up his rosary and began to count the fifteen decades of the Blessed Virgin. While one part of him was repeating the Aves, another was conscious of the pleasant, warm, heavy feel of the ivory beads and the crisp contrast of the crystal. He had made up his mind to take the Holy Father's gift to Mars with him. It would be a pity if it were lost — well, it would be a pity if *he* were lost too, he thought. He could not weigh risks like that, and so he decided to do what His Holiness had evidently meant him to do and take this gift on the longest journey it had ever known.

He became conscious of someone standing behind him. "Good morning, Father Kayman."

"Hello, Sulie." He glanced at her curiously. What was strange about her? There seemed to be golden roots to her dark hair, but that was nothing particularly surprising; even a priest knew that women chose their hair color at will. For that matter, so did some priests.

"How's it going?" she asked.

"I'd say perfect. Look at them jump! Roger looks as ready as he'll ever be, and, *Deo volente*, I think we'll make the launch date."

"I envy you," the nurse said, peering past him into the Mars-normal tank. He turned his face to her, startled. There had been more feeling in her voice than a casual remark seemed to justify. "I mean it, Don," she said. "The reason I got into the space program in the first place was that I wanted to go up myself. Might have made it, if —"

She stopped and shrugged. "Well, I'm helping you and Roger, I guess," she said. "Isn't that what they used to say women were for? Helpmeets. It isn't a bad thing, anyway when it's as important a thing to help as this."

"You don't really sound convinced of that," Kayman offered.

She grinned and then turned back to the tank.

The music had stopped. Kathleen Doughty took the cigarette out of her lips, lit another and said, "Okay, Roger, Alfred. Take ten. You're doing great."

Inside the tank Roger allowed himself to sit cross-legged. He looked exactly like the Devil in the classical old Disney tape, Kayman thought. *A Night on Bare Mountain*?

"What's the matter, Roger?" Kathleen Doughty called. "You're surely not tired."

"Tired of this," he groused. "I don't know why I need this ballet dancing. Willy didn't have it."

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"Willy died," she snapped.

There was a silence. Roger turned his head toward her, peering through the glass with his great compound eyes. He snarled, "Not because of lack of entrechats."

"How do you know that? Oh," she admitted grudgingly, "I suppose you could survive without some of this. But you're better with it. It's not just a matter of learning how to get around. The other thing you have to learn to do is avoid destroying your environment. Do you have any idea how strong you are now?"

Inside the tank Roger hesitated, then shook his head. "I don't feel strong, particularly," his flat voice said.

"You can punch through a wall, Roger. Ask Alfred. What do you run the mile in, Alfred?"

The ex-paraplegic folded his hands over his fat belly and grinned. He was fifty-eight years old and had not been much of an athlete even before the myasthenia gravis destroyed his natural limbs. "A minute forty-seven," he said with pride.

"I expect you to do better than that, Roger," called Kathleen. "So you have to learn how to control it."

Roger made a noise that wasn't quite a word, then stood up. "Balance the locks," he said. "I'm coming out."

The technician touched a switch, and the great pumps began to let air into the exit chamber with a sound like ripping linoleum.. "Oh," moaned Sulie Carpenter, next to Don Kayman, "I don't have my contacts in!" And she fled before Roger could come into the room.

Kayman stared after her. One puzzle was solved: he knew what had looked strange about her. But why would Sulie wear contacts that changed her brown eyes to green?

He shrugged and gave up.

We knew the answer. We had gone to a lot of trouble to find Sulie Carpenter. The critical factors made a long list, and the least important of items on that list were the color of hair and the color of eyes, since either could be so easily changed.

As the deadline approached, Roger's position began to change. For two weeks he had been meat on a butcher's block, slashed and rolled and chopped with no personal participation and no control over what happened to him. Then he had been a student, following the orders of his teachers, learning the control of his senses and the use of his limbs. It was a transition from laboratory preparation to demigod, and he was more than halfway there.

He felt it happening. For days now he had been questioning

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everything he was told to do and sometimes refusing. Kathleen Doughty was no longer his boss, capable of ordering him to a hundred chinups and an hour of pirouettes. She was his employee, retained by him to help in what he wanted to do. Brad, who had become far less offhandedly humorous and far more intense, was now asking Roger for favors: "Try these color discrimination tests for me, will you? It'll look good on my paper about you —" Often Roger humored them. Sometimes not.

The one he humored most frequently and surely was Sulie Carpenter, because she was always there and always cared about him. He had almost forgotten how much she looked like Dorrie. He only was aware that she looked very good.

She met his moods. If he was edgy, she was quietly cheerful. If he wanted to talk, she talked. They played board games sometimes; she was a highly competitive Scrabble player. Once, late at night, when Roger was experimenting with the length of wakefulness he could handle, she brought in a guitar and they sang, her pleasant, unobstrusive contralto ornamenting his flat and almost toneless whisper. Her face changed as he looked at it, but he had learned to handle that. The interpretation circuits in his sensorium reflected his feelings when he let them, and there were times when Sulie Carpenter looked more like Dorrie than Dorrie did herself.

Nine days to liftoff.

It was less than that, really. He would be flown to Merritt Island three days before the launch, and his last day in Tonka would be devoted to fitting the backpack computer and retuning some of his sensorium for the special Martain conditions. So he had six, no five, days.

And he had not seen Dorrie for weeks.

He looked at himself in the mirror he had demanded they install: insect eyes, bat wings, dully gleaming flesh. He amused himself by letting his visual interpretations flow, from bat to giant fly to demon ... to himself, as he remembered himself, pleasant-faced and youthful.

If only Dorrie had a computer to mediate her sight! If only she could see him as he had been! He swore he would not call her; he could not force her to look at the comic-strip contraption that was her husband.

Having sworn, he picked up the phone and dialed her number.

It was an impulse that could not be denied. He waited. His accordion-pleated time sense prolonged the interval, so that it was an eternity before the raster blaze from the screen and the buzz from

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the speaker sounded the first ring.

Then time betrayed him again. It seemed forever until the second ring. Then it came, and lasted an eternity, and was over.

She did not answer.

Roger, who was the sort of person who counted things, knew that most persons did not respond until the third ring. Dorrie, however, was always eager to know whom the phone was bringing into her life. From a sound sleep or out of the bathtub, she seldom let it ring past twice.

At length the third ring came and still no reply.

Roger began to hurt.

He controlled it as best he could, unwilling to sound the alarms on the telemetry. He could not stop it entirely. She was out, he thought. Her husband had turned into a monster, and she was not at home sympathizing, or worrying; she was shopping, or visiting a friend, or at a flick.

Or with a man.

What man? Brad, he thought. It wouldn't be impossible; he had left Brad down at the tank twenty-five minutes ago by the clock. Time enough for them to rendezvous somewhere. Even time enough for Brad to get to the Torraway home. Perhaps she was not out at all. Perhaps —

Fourth ring —

Perhaps they were there, the two of them, naked and coupling on the floor in front of the phone. She would be saying, "Go in the other room, honey, I want to see who it is." And he would say, laughing, "No, let's answer this way." And she would say —

Fifth ring — and the raster blossomed into the colors of Dorrie's face. Her voice said, "Hello?"

Quick as sound, Roger's fist shot out and covered the lens. "Dorrie," he said. His voice sounded flat and harsh again to him. "How are you?"

"Roger!" she cried. The pleasure in her voice sounded very real. "Oh, honey, I'm so glad to hear you! How are you feeling?"

His voice automatically said, "Fine." It went on, without the need of help from his conscious mind, to correct the statement, to say what had been happening to him, cataloguing the tests and the exercises. At the same time he was staring into the screen with every sense on high gain.

She looked — what? Tired? Looking tired was confirmation of his fears. She was carousing with Brad every night, heedless of her husband in pain and clownish humiliation. Rested and cheerful? Looking rested and cheerful was confirmation, too. It meant she was relaxing, enjoying herself — heedless of her husband's torment.

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There was really nothing wrong with Torraway's brain, in that it had a lifelong habit of analysis and logic. It did not fail to occur to him that the game he was playing with himself was called "You Lose." *Everything* was evidence of Dorrie's guilt. Yet, no matter how carefully he scanned her image, with what multiplied senses, she didn't look hostile or cloyingly overaffectionate. She only looked like Dorrie.

When he thought that, he felt a burst of tenderness that made his voice break. "I've missed you, honey," he said, flatly. The only thing that spoke of feelings was that one syllable was retarded a fraction of a second: "Hon. Ee."

"And I've missed you. I've kept myself busy, dear," she chattered. "I've been painting your den. It's a surprise, but of course it's going to be such a long time till you see it that — Well, it's going to be peach. With buttercup woodwork and I think maybe a pale-blue ceiling. You like? I was going to make it all ocher and brown, you know, fall colors, Mars colors, to celebrate. But I thought by the time you got back you'd be pretty sick of Mars colors!" And quickly, without pause: "When am I going to see you?"

The change in her voice caught him by surprise.

"Well, I look pretty awful," he said.

"I know what you look like. Dear God, Roger, do you think Midge and Brenda and Callie and I haven't talked this over for the last two years? Ever since the program started. We've seen the sketches. We've seen the photos of the mockups. And we've seen the pictures of Willy."

"I'm not exactly like Willy any more. They've changed things —"

"And I know about that too, Roger. Brad told me all about it. I'd like to see you."

At that moment his wife's face changed without warning to a witch's. The crochet hook she held became a peasant twig broom. "You've been seeing Brad?"

Was there a microsecond pause before she answered? "I suppose he shouldn't have told me," she said, "because of security and all. But I wanted him to. It's not that bad, honey. I'm a big girl. I can handle it."

For a moment Roger wanted to snatch his hand away from the lens and let himself be seen, but he was becoming confused, feeling strange. He could not interpret his feelings. Was it vertigo? Emotion? Some malfunction in his machine half? He knew it would be only moments until Sulie or Don Kayman or someone came in, warned by the telltale telemetry outside. He tried to control himself.

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"Maybe later," he said without conviction. "I — I think I'd better hang up now, Dorrie."

Behind her, their familiar living room was changing too. The depth of field of the phone lens was not very good; even to his machine senses the rest of the room was blurred. Was that a man standing in the shadows? Was it wearing an Air Force officer's blouse? Would Brad be doing that?

"I have to hang up now," he said, and did.

Clara Bly came in, full of questions and concern. He shook his head at her without speaking.

There were no lachrymal ducts in his new eyes; so of course he could not cry. Even that relief was denied him.

Chapter Eleven

Dorothy Louise Mintz Torraway as Penelope

Our trendline projections had shown that the time was right to let the world know about Roger Torraway, warts and all. So it had all gone out, and every TV screen in the world had seen Roger on point in a dozen perfect fouettes, in between the close-ups of the starved dead in Pakistan and the fires in Chicago.

It had the effect of making Dorrie a celebrity. Roger's call had upset her. Not as much as the note from Brad saying that he wouldn't be able to see her again, not nearly as much as the forty-five minutes the President had spent with her impressing on her what would happen if she messed up his pet astronaut. Certainly not as much as the knowledge that she was being followed, her telephone tapped, her home certainly bugged. But she hadn't known how to deal with Roger. She suspected she never would and did not mind at all that in a few days he would be launched into space, where there would be little necessity for her to worry about their relationship for a least a year and a half.

She also did not mind the sudden glare of publicity.

Now that the newspapers had it, all the TV reporters had been to see her, and she had seen her own courageous face on the six o'clock report. *Fem* was sending someone around. The someone phoned first. She was a woman of about sixty, veteran of the lib years, who sniffed, "We never do this, interviewing somebody just because she's somebody's wife. But they wanted it. I couldn't turn down the assignment, but I want to be honest with you and let you know that it's distasteful to me."

"I'm sorry," Dorrie apologized. "Do you want me to cancel out?"

"Oh, no," said the woman, speaking as though it were Dorrie's

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fault, "it's not your fault, but I think it's a betrayal of everything *Fem* stands for. Never mind. I want to come up to your home. We'll do a fifteen-minute spread for the cassette edition, and I'll write it up for the print. If you can —"

"I —" Dorrie began.

"— try to talk about you, rather than him. Your background. Your interests. Your —"

"I don't want to have it in my home," Dorrie inserted into the conversation, without waiting for a place for it.

"— think about it, and answer on camera. Not at your home? No, that's not possible. We'll be over in an hour."

Dorrie was left with a dwindling spot of light to talk to, and then even that was gone. "Bitch," she said, almost absent-mindedly. She didn't really mind having the interview in her home. She minded not being given a choice. That she minded a lot. But there was no choice available to her, except to go out before the *Fem* person showed up.

Dorrie Torraway, Dee Mintz as was, felt strongly about having choices. One of the things that had attracted her to Roger in the first place, apart from the glamor of the space program and the security and money that went with it — and apart from Roger's rather nice-looking, sturdy self — was that he was willing to listen to what she wanted. Other men had been mostly interested in what they wanted, which was not the same from man to man but very consistent within the range of relationships of any one man. Harold always wanted to dance and party, Jim always wanted sex, Everett wanted sex *and* parties, Tommy wanted political dedication, Joe wanted mothering. What Roger wanted was to explore the world with her along, and he seemed perfectly willing to explore the parts of it that she wanted as much as the parts that were important to him.

She had never regretted marrying him.

There were a lot of lonely times. Fifty-four days when he was in Space Station Three. Any number of shorter missions. Two years on tour duty all over the world, working with the whole system of ground monitoring stations from Aachen to Zaire, with no proper home anywhere. Dorrie had given that up, after a while, and gone back to the apartment in Houston. But she hadn't minded. Perhaps Roger had; the question had never crossed her mind. Anyway, they had seen each other quite often enough. He had been home every month or two, and she kept her time full. There was her shop — she had opened it while Roger was in

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Iceland, with a five thousand dollar check he sent her for her birthday. There were her friends. There were, from time to time, men.

At thirty-one Dorrie was as healthy, as pretty and as competent to deal with the world as she ever had been or would be again. She described herself as happy. This diagnosis did not come from any welling up of joy inside herself. It came from the observed fact, looking at herself objectively, that whenever she decided she wanted somehing, she always got it; and what other definition of happiness could there be?

She used the time until Ms. Hagar Hengstrom and her crew from *Fem* arrived to assemble a selection of ceramic ware from her shop on the coffee table before the couch she intended to sit in. What time was left she devoted to the less important task of brushing her hair, checking her make-up and changing into her newest laced-pants suit.

When the doorbell rang she was quite ready.

Ms. Hagar Hengstrom pumped her hand and walked in, brilliant blue hair and a curly black cigar. She was followed by her lightperson, her soundperson, her cameraperson and her prop boys. "Room's small," she muttered, appraising the furnishing with contempt. "Torraway will sit there. Move it."

The prop boys jumped to manhandle an easy chair from its place by the window to the corner now occupied by a breakfront, which they tugged into the center of the room. "Wait a minute," said Dorrie. "I thought I'd just sit on the couch here —"

"Don't you have the light reading yet?" Hengstrom demanded. "Sally, start the camera. You never know what we might use for rollunder."

"I mean it," Dorrie said.

Hengstrom looked at her. The voice had not been loud, but the tone was dangerous. She shrugged. "Let's set it up," she proposed, "and if you don't like it, we'll talk it over. Run through for me, will you?"

"Run through what?" The pale young girl with the hand-held camera was pointing it at her, Dorrie noticed; it distracted her. The lightperson had found a wall socket and was holding a crucifix of floods in each hand, moving them gently to erase shadows as they formed with each of Dorrie's moves.

"Well, for openers, what are your plans for the next two years? You're surely not going to hang around waiting for Roger Torraway to come home?"

Dorrie tried to make her way to the couch, but the lightperson frowned and waved her in the other

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direction, and two of the prop boys shoved the coffee table out of reach. She said, "I've got my shop. I thought you might like to have some of the pieces from it on camera while you interviewed me?"

"That's fine, sure. I meant personally. You're a healthy woman. You have sexual needs. Back up a little, please — Sandra's getting a buzz from something on the sound system."

Dorrie found herself standing in front of the chair, and there seemed nothing to do but to sit in it. "Of course —" she began.

"You have a responsibility," Hengstrom said. "What sort of an example are you going to set young womanhood? Turning yourself into a dried-up old maid? Or living a naturally full life?"

"I don't know if I want to discuss —"

"I've checked you out pretty carefully, Torraway. I like what I've found out. You're your own person — as much as any person can be, anyway, who accepts the ridiculous farce of marriage. Why'd you do it?"

Dorrie hesitated. "Roger's really a very nice person," she offered.

"What about it?"

"Well, I mean, he offered me a great deal of comfort and support —"

Hagar Hengstrom sighed. "Same old slave psychology. Never mind. The other thing that puzzles me is your getting involved in the space program. Don't you feel it's a sexist shuffle?"

"Why, no. The President told me himself," Dorrie said, aware that she was trying to score points in case of another visit from Dash, "that putting a man on Mars was absolutely indispensable to the future of the human race. I believe him. We owe a —"

"Play that back," Hengstrom commanded.

"What?"

"Play back what you just said. Putting a what on Mars?"

"A man. Oh. I see what you mean."

Hengstrom nodded sadly. "You see what I mean, but you don't change the way you think. Why a man? Why not a person?" She looked commiseratingly at the soundperson, who shook her head in sympathy. "Well, let's get to something more important: Do you know that the whole crew of the Mars voyage is supposed to be male? What do you think of that?"

It was quite a morning for Dorrie. She never did get her ceramic pieces on camera.

When Sulie Carpenter came on duty that afternoon, she brought Roger two surprises: a cassette of the interview, borrowed from the project public-relations (read: cen-

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sorship) office, and a guitar. She gave him the cassette first and let him watch the interview while she remade his bed and changed the water for his flowers.

When it was over she said brightly, "Your wife handled herself very well, I thought. I met Hagar Hengstrom once. She's a very difficult woman."

"Dorrie looked fine," said Roger. You could not read any expression in the remade face, or hear it in the flat tones, but the bat wings were fluttering restlessly. "I always liked those pants."

Sulie nodded and made a note to herself: the open lacing up both sides of each leg showed a great deal of flesh. Evidently the steroids implanted in Roger were doing their job. "Now I've got something else," she said and opened the guitar case.

"You're going to play for me?"

"No, Roger. *You're* going to play."

"I can't play the guitar, Sulie," he protested.

She laughed. "I've been talking to Brad," she said, "and I think you're going to be surprised. You're not just different, you know, Roger. You're better. For instance, your fingers."

"What about them?"

"Well, I've been playing the guitar since I was nine, and if I stop for a couple of weeks, my calluses go and I have to start all over again. Your fingers don't need calluses; they're hard enough and firm enough to fret the strings first time perfectly."

"Fine," said Roger, "only I don't even know what you're talking about. What's 'fret'?"

"Press them down. Like this." She strummed a G chord, then a D and a C.

"Now you do it," she said. "The only thing to watch out for, don't use too much strength. It's breakable." She handed him the guitar.

He swept his thumb over the open strings, as he had seen her do.

"That's fine," she applauded. "Now make a G. Ring finger on the third fret of the high E string — there. First finger on the second fret of the A. Middle finger on the third fret of the low E." She guided his hands. "Now hit it."

He strummed and looked up at her. "Hey," he said. "Nice."

She grinned and corrected him. "Not nice. Perfect. Now, this is a C. First finger on the second fret of the B string, middle finger there, ring finger there .... Right. And this is a D chord: first and middle finger on the G and E strings, there, ring finger one fret lower on the B .... Perfect again. Now give me a G."

To his surprise, Roger strummed a perfect G.

She smiled. "See? Brad was

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right. Once you know a chord, you know it; the 3070 remembers it for you. All you have to do is think 'G chord,' and your fingers do it. You are now," she said in mock sorrow, "about three months ahead of where I was the first time I tried to play the guitar."

"That's pretty nice," Roger said, trying all three chords, one after another.

"That's only the beginning. Now strum a four-beat, you know, dum, dum, dum, dum. With a G chord —" She listened, then nodded. "Fine. Now do it like this: G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, C, C, G, G, G, G, G .... Fine. Now again, only this time after the C, C do D, D, D, D, D D .... Fine again. Now do them both, one after the other —"

He played, and she sang with him: "Kumbaya, my lord. Kumbaya! Kumbaya, my lord. Kumbaya ...."

"Hey!" Roger cried, delighted.

She shook her head in mock dismay. "Three minutes from the time you pick up the guitar, and you're already an accompanist. Here. I brought you a chord book and some simple pieces. By the time I get back you should be playing all of them, and I'll start you on finger-plucking, sliding and hammering."

She showed him how to read the tabulature for each chord and left him happily puzzling out the first six modulations of the F.

Outside his room she paused to take out her contacts, rubbed her eyes and marched to the office of the Director. Scanyon's secretary waved her in.

"He's happy with his guitar, General," she reported. "Less happy about his wife."

Vern Scanyon nodded and turned up a knob on the comm set on his desk: the sound of the chords for *Kentucky Babe* came from the tap in Roger's room. He turned it down again. "I know about the guitar, Major Carpenter. What about his wife?"

"I'm afraid he loves her," she said slowly. "He's all right up to a point. Past that point I think we're in trouble. I can bolster him up as long as he's here at the project, but he'll be a long time away and — I'm not sure."

Scanyon said sharply, "Get the marbles out of your mouth, Major!"

"I think he'll miss her more than he can handle. It's bad enough now. I watched him while he was looking at that tape. He didn't move a muscle, rigid concentration, didn't want to miss a thing. When he's forty million miles away from her — Well. I've got everything taped, General. I'll run a computer simulation, and then maybe I can be more specific.

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But I'm concerned."

"*You're* concerned!" Scanyon snapped. "Dash will have my ass if we get him up there and he blows!"

"What can I tell you, General? Let me run the simulation. Then maybe I can tell you how to handle it."

She sat down without waiting to be asked and ran her hands over her forehead. "Leading a double life takes a lot out of you, General," she offered. "Eight hours as a nurse and eight hours as a shrink isn't any fun."

"Ten years on staff duty in Antarctica is even less fun, Major," Vern Scanyon said simply.

The Presidential jet had reached its cruising altitude of 31,000 meters and slid into high gear — Mach 3 and a bit, grotesquely faster than even a Presidential CB-5 was supposed to go. The President was in a hurry.

The Midway Summit Conference had just ended in disarray. Stretched out on his chaise longue with his eyes closed, pretending to be asleep to keep the Senators who had accompanied him out of his hair, Dash bleakly considered his options. They were few.

He had not hoped for a great deal from the conference, but it had begun well enough. The Australians indicated they would accept limited cooperation with the NPA in developing the outback, subject to appropriate guarantees, et cetera, et cetera. The NPA delegation murmured among themselves and announced that they would be happy to provide guarantees, since their real objectives were only to provide a maximum of the necessities of life for all the world's people, considered as a single unit regardless of antiquated national boundaries, et cetera. Dash himself shook off his whispering advisors and stated that America's interest in this conference was only to provide good-offices assistance to its two dearly beloved neighbors and sought nothing for itself, et cetera; and for a time there, all of two hours, it had seemed that there might be a substantive, useful product of the conference.

Then they began getting into the fine detail. The Asians offered a million-man Soil Army plus a stream of tankers carrying three million gallons a week of concentrated sludge from the sewers of Shanghai. The Australians accepted the fertilizer but spoke of a maximum of 50,000 Asians to till the land. Also, they pointed out politely, that as it was Australian land and Australian sunshine that was being used, it would be Australian wheat that would be grown. The man from the State Department reminded Dash of

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American commitments to Peru, and with a heavy heart Dash rose to insist on at least a fifteen per cent allocation to good neighbors on the South American continent. And tempers began to rise. The precipitating incident was an NPA shuttle plane that ran into a flock of black-footed albatrosses as it took off from the Sand Island runway, crashed and burned on an islet in the lagoon, in full view of the conference members on the rooftop of the Holiday Inn. Then there were harsh words. The Japanese member of the NPA delegation allowed himself to say what he had previously only thought: that America's insistence on holding the conference at the site of one of the most famous battles of World War II was a calculated insult to Asians. The Australians commented that they had controlled their own gooney-bird populations without much trouble and were astonished that the Americans had not succeeded in doing the same. And the gain of three weeks of preparation and two days of hope was a tightly worded announcement that all three powers had agreed to further discussions. Sometime. Somewhere. Not very soon.

But what it all meant, Dash admitted to himself as he tossed restlessly on the chaise longue, was that the confrontation was eyeball to eyeball. Somebody would have to give, and nobody would.

He got up and called for coffee. When it came there was a scribbled note on Airborne White House stationery from one of the Senators: "Mr. President, we must settle the disaster-area proclamation before we land."

Dash crumpled it up. That was Senator Talltree, full of complaints: Lake Altus had shrunk to twenty per cent of its normal size; tourism in the Arbuckle Mountains was dead because there was no water coming over Turner Falls; the Sooner State Fair had had to be canceled because of blowing dust. Oklahoma should be declared a disaster area. He had fifty-four states, Dash reflected, and if he listened to all the Senators and governors, he would be declaring fifty-four disaster areas. There really was only one disaster area. It merely happened to be worldwide.

And I *ran* for this job, he marveled.

Thinking of Oklahoma made him think of Roger Torraway. For a moment he considered calling the pilot and diverting the flight to Tonka. But the meeting with the Combined Chiefs of Staff would not wait. He would have to content himself with the telephone.

He was playing a Segovia recital from memory, from a single

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hearing of the tape, when the President's phone call came in.

There was a time when Roger would have been awed and delighted by a call from the President of the United States. Now it was an annoyance; it meant taking time away from his guitar.

He hardly listened to what the President had to say. He was struck by the care on Dash's face, the deep lines that had not been there a few days before, the sunken eyes. Then he realized that his interpretation circuits were exaggerating what they saw to call his attention to the changes; he overrode the mediation circuits and saw Dash plain.

But he was still careworn. His voice was all warmth and good fellowship as he asked Roger how things were going, was there anything he needed? Could he think of an ass to kick to get things goin' right? "Everything's fine, Mr. President," Roger said, amusing himself by letting his trick eyes deck the President's face out in Santa Claus beard and red tasseled cap, with a bundle of intangible gifts over his shoulder.

"Sure now, Roger?" Dash pressed. "You're not forgetting what I told you: whatever you want, you just yell."

"I'll yell," Roger promised. "But I'm doing fine. Waiting for the launch." And waiting for you to get off the phone, he thought, bored with the conversation.

The President frowned. Roger's interpreters immediately changed the image: Dash was still Santa Clause, but ebony black and with enormous fangs. "You're not overconfident, are you?" he asked.

"Well, how would I know if I was?" Roger asked reasonably. "I don't think so. Ask the staff here; they can tell you more about me than I can."

He managed to terminate the conversation a few exchanges later, knowing that the President was unsatisfied and vaguely troubled, not caring much. There was less and less that Roger really cared about, he thought to himself. And he had been truthful: he really was looking forward to the launch. He would miss Sulie and Clara. He was, in the back of his mind, faintly worried about the danger and the duration of the trip. But he was also buoyed up with anticipation of what he would find when he got there: the planet he was made to inhabit.

He picked up the guitar and started again on the Segovia, but it didn't go as well as he would like. After a time he realized that the gift of absolute pitch was also a handicap: Segovia's guitar had not been tuned to a perfect 440 A, it was a few Hertz flat, and his D string was almost a quarter-tone relatively flatter still. He shrugged

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— the bat wings flailed with the gesture — and put the guitar down.

He sat upright on his guitar chair, straight-backed and armless, for a moment, inviting his thoughts.

Something *was* troubling him. The name of the something was Dorrie. Playing the guitar was pleasant and relaxing, but behind the pleasure was a daydream: a fantasy of sitting on the deck of a sailboat with Dorrie and Brad, and casually borrowing Brad's guitar and astonishing them all.

In some arcane way all the processes of his life terminated in Dorrie. The purpose of playing the guitar was to please Dorrie. The horror of his appearance was that it would offend Dorrie. The tragedy of castration was that he would fail Dorrie. Most of the pain had lifted from these things, and he could look at them in a way that had been impossible a few weeks before, but they were still there buried inside him.

He reached for the phone and drew back his hand.

Calling Dorrie was not satisfactory. He had tried that.

What he really wanted was to see her.

That, of course, was impossible. He was not allowed to leave the project. Vern Scanyon would be furious. The guards would stop him at the door. The telemetry would reveal at once what he was doing; the closed-circuit electronic surveillance would locate him at every step; all the resources of the project would be mobilized to prevent his leaving.

And there would be no point in asking permission. Not even in asking Dash; the most that would happen would be that the President would give an order and Dorrie would be delivered, coerced and furious, in his room. Roger did not want Dorrie made to come to him, and he was sure he would not be allowed to go to her.

On the other hand ....

On the other hand, he reflected, why did he need permission?

He thought for a minute, sitting perfectly still in his straight-backed chair.

Then he put the guitar carefully away in its case and moved.

The first thing he did was bend to the wall, pull a baseboard plug out of its moorings and stick his finger into it. The copper nail on his finger was as good as a penny any day. The fuses blew. The lights in the room went out. The whicka-whicka and gentle whisper of the reels of the recording machines slowed and stopped. The room went dark.

There was still heat, and that was light enough for Roger's eyes. He could see quite well enough to pull the telemetry leads out of his

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body. He was out the door before Clara Bly, pouring cream into a cup on her coffee break, looked around at the buzzing readout board.

He had done better than he planned with the fuses; the hall lights were out as well. There were people in the corridor, but in the dark they could not see. Roger was past them and taking the fire stairs four at a time before they knew he was gone. He settled into the workings of his body with ease and grace. All of Kathleen Doughty's ballet training was paying off; he danced down the stairs, piled through a door, leaped along a corridor and was out into the cold night air before the security man at the door looked around from his TV set.

He was in the open, racing down the freeway toward the city of Tonka at forty miles an hour.

The night was bright with kinds of light he had never seen before. Overhead there was a solid layer of clouds, stratocumulus scudding along from the north and thick middle-level clouds above them; even so, he could see dim glows where the brightest stars filtered some of their radiation through. The Oklahoma prairie on either side was somberly glowing with the tiny residual heat retained from the day, punctuated with splotches of brilliance where there was a home or a farm building. The cars on the freeway were tailed by great plumes of light, bright where they left the exhaust pipe, reddening and darkening as the clouds of hot gas expanded into the chilling air. As he entered the city itself, he saw and avoided an occasional pedestrian, each a luminous Hallowe'en figure, dully glowing in their own body heat. The buildings around him had trapped a little heat from the end of the day, were spilling more from their own central heating; they glowed like fireflies.

He stopped at the corner of his own home street. There was a car parked across from the door, with two men inside it. Warning signals flashed in his brain, and the car became a tank, howitzer pointed at his head. They were no problem. He changed course and ran through the back yards, scaling fences and slipping through gates, and at his own home he extruded the copper nails in his fingers for purchase and climbed right up the outside wall.

It was what he wanted to do. Not just to avoid the men in the car outside, but to act out a fantasy: the moment when he would burst in on Dorrie through the window, to catch her at — what?

In the event, what he caught her at was watching a late movie on television. Her hair was sticky with coloring compound, and she was eating a solitary dish of ice cream,

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propped up in bed.

As he slid the unlocked window open and crawled through, she turned toward him.

She screamed.

It was not just a cry, it was instant hysterics. Dorrie spilled her ice cream and leaped out of bed. The TV set toppled and crunched to the floor. Dorrie pressed herself against the far wall, eyes squeezed tight and fists pressed against them, sobbing.

"I'm sorry," Roger said inadequately. He wanted to approach her, but reason prevented. She looked very helpless and appealing, in her see-through butcher-boy smock and tiny bikini-ribbon panties.

"*Sorry*," she gasped, looked at him, averted her eyes and fumbled her way into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Well, thought Roger, she was not to be blamed; he had a clear notion of what a grotesque sight he had been, coming through a window without warning. "You did say you knew what I looked like," he called.

There was no answer from the bathroom, only, a moment later, the running of water. He glanced around the room. It looked exactly as it had always looked. The closets were as full of her clothes and his as they had always been. The spaces behind the couches were as empty of lovers as ever. He was not proud of himself for searching the apartment like any medieval cuckold, but he did not stop until he was certain she had been alone.

"Christ," he said. He had no clear idea of how this meeting would go, but apparently it had begun badly.

When Dorrie came out of the bathroom she wasn't crying, but she wasn't speaking either. She went into the kitchen without looking at him. "I want a cup of tea," she said over her shoulder.

"Wouldn't you rather I made you a drink?" Roger offered hopefully.

"No."

Roger could hear the sounds of the electric kettle being filled, the faint susurrus as it began to simmer and, several times, a cough. He listened harder and heard his wife's breathing, which became slower and steadier.

He sat down in the chair that had always been his chair and waited. His wings were in the way. Even though they elevated themselves automatically over his head, he could not lean back. Restlessly he roamed into the living room. His wife's voice called through the swinging doors: "Do you want some tea?"

"No." Then he added, "No, thank you." Actually he would have

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liked it very much, not because of any need for fluids or nutrients but for the feeling of participating in some normal, precedented event with Dorrie. But he did not want to spill and slobber in front of her, and he had not practiced much with cups and saucers and liquids.

"Where are you?" She hesitated at the swinging doors, the cup in her hands, and then saw him. "Oh. Why don't you turn a light on?"

"I don't want to. Honey, sit down and close your eyes for a minute." He had an idea.

"Why?" But she did as he requested, in the wing chair on one side of the fake fireplace. He picked up the chair, with her in it, and turned it away, so that she was facing into the wall.

He stood behind her and said, "I'd feel better if you weren't looking at me."

"I understand that, Roger. You frightened me, is all. I wish you hadn't burst in the window like that! On the other hand, I shouldn't have been so positive I could see you, I mean like *that*, without — Without going into hysterics, I guess is what I want to say."

"I know what I look like," he said.

"It's still you though, isn't it?" Dorrie said to the wall. "Although I don't remember you ever climbing a wall to get into my bed before."

"It's easy," he said, taking a chance on what was almost an attempt at lightness.

"Well —" she paused for a sip of tea — "tell me. What's this about?"

"I wanted to see you, Dorrie."

"You did see me. On the phone."

"I didn't want it to be on the phone. I wanted to be in the same room with you." He wanted even more than that to touch her, to reach out to the nape of her neck and press and caress the tendons into relaxing; but he did not quite dare that. Instead he reached down and ignited the gas flame in the fireplace, not so much for warmth as for a little light to help Dorrie. And for cheerfulness.

"We aren't supposed to do that, Roger. There's a thousand-dollar fine —"

He laughed. "Not for you and me, Dorrie. Anybody gives you any trouble, you call up Dash and say I said it was all right."

His wife took a cigarette from the box on the end table and lit it. "Roger, dear," she said slowly, "I'm not used to all this. I don't just mean the way you look. I understand about that. It's hard, but at least I knew what it was going to be before it happened. Even if I didn't think it would be *you*. But I'm not used to your being so, I don't know, important."

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"I'm not used to it either, Dorrie." He thought back to the TV reporters and the cheering crowds when he returned to Earth after rescuing the Russians. "It's different now. I feel as if I'm carrying something on my back — the world, maybe."

"Dash says that's exactly what you're doing. Half of what he says is bullshit, but I don't think that part is. You're a pretty significant man, Roger. You were always a famous one. Maybe that's why I married you. But that was like being a rock star, you know? It was exciting, but you could always walk away from it if you got tired of it. This I don't think you can walk away from."

She stubbed out her cigarette. "Anyway," she said, "you're here, and they're probably going crazy at the project."

"I can handle that."

"Yes," she said, thoughtfully, "I guess you can. What shall we talk about?"

"Brad," he said. He had not intended it. The word came out of his artificial larynx, shaped by his restructured lips, with no intervention by his conscious mind.

He could feel her stiffening up. "What about Brad?" she asked.

"Your sleeping with him, that's what about Brad," he said. The back of her neck was glowing dully now, and he knew that if he could see her face it would display the revealing tracery of veins. The dancing gas flames from the fireplace made an attractive spectrum of colors on her dark hair; he watched the play appreciatively, as though it did not matter what he was saying to his wife, or she to him.

She said, "Roger, I really don't know how to deal with you. Are you angry with me?"

He watched the dancing colors silently.

"After all, Roger, we talked this out years ago. You have had affairs, and so have I. We agreed they didn't mean anything."

"They mean something when they hurt." He willed his vision to stop and welcomed the darkness as an aid to thought. "The others were different," he said.

"Different how?" She was angry now.

"Different because we talked them over," he said doggedly. "When I was in Algiers and you couldn't stand the climate, that was one thing. What you did back here in Tonka and what I did in Algiers didn't affect you and me. When I was in orbit —"

"I never slept with anybody else while you were in orbit!"

"I know that, Dorrie. I thought that was kind of you. I really did, because it wouldn't have been fair, would it? I mean, my own opportunities were pretty limited.

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Only old Yuli Bronin, and he wasn't my type. But now it's different. It's like I was in orbit again, only worse. I don't even have Yuli! I not only don't have a girl friend, I don't have the equipment to do anything about it if I did."

She said wretchedly, "I know all that. What can I tell you?"

"You can tell me you'll be a good wife to me!" he roared.

That frightened her; he had forgotten what his voice could sound like. She began to cry.

He reached out to touch her and then let his hand fall. What was the use?

Oh, Christ, he thought. What a mess! He took consolation only in that this interview had been here, in the privacy of their own home, quite unplanned and secret. It would have been unbearable in the presence of anyone else; but, of course, naturally we had monitored every word.

Chapter Twelve

Two Simulations and a Reality

Copper-fingered Roger had blown more than a fuse. He had shorted a whole box of circuit breakers. It took twenty minutes to get the lights on again.

The first one to know what had happened was Sulie Carpenter, catching a catnap in the office next to the computer room, waiting for Roger's simulation to finish. It didn't finish. The alarm bells woke her, signifying interruption of the information being processed. The bright fluorescent rods were out, and only the red incandescents gave a dim, despairing glow.

Her first thought was her precious simulation. She spent twenty minutes on it before she gave up and charged out to Vern Scanyon's office. That was when she found out that Roger had run off.

Power was back by then; it had come on while she was taking the fire stairs two at a time. Scanyon was already on the phone, ordering the people he wanted to blame in for an emergency conference. Clara Bly was the one who told Sulie about Roger; one by one, as the others entered the room, they were brought up to date. Don Kayman was the only major figure who was out of the project; they located him watching television in his clerical condominium. Kathleen Doughty came up from the physiotherapy room in the basement, dragging Brad with her, all pink-skinned and damp; he had been trying to substitute an hour in the sauna for a night's sleep.

Scanyon had already ordered an Air Force spottercopter into the air, in a search pattern all around the project. Its TV cameras were sweeping the freeway, the access

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roads, the parking lots, the fields and prairie, and displaying what they saw on the wall TV at the end of the room. The Tonka police force had been alerted to watch for a strange devil-like creature running around at forty miles an hour, which had led to trouble for the Tonka desk sergeant. He made a bad mistake. He asked the project security officer if he had been drinking. Ten seconds later, with his head filled with visions of pounding a beat in Kiska, the sergeant was on the police radio to all vehicles and foot patrolmen. The orders for the police were not to arrest Roger, not even to approach him. They were only to find him.

What Scanyon wanted was someone to blame. "I hold you responsible, Dr. Ramez," he barked at the staff shrink. "You and Major Carpenter. How could you let Torraway get into this sort of action without advance warning?"

Ramez said placatingly, "General, I told you Roger was unstable in regard to his wife. That's why I asked for someone like Sulie. He needed another object to fixate on, someone directly connected with the project —"

"Didn't work very well, did it?"

Sulie stopped listening. She knew very well that her turn was next, but she was trying to think. Over Scanyon's desk she saw the moving view from the copter. It was expressed as a schematic, the roads as lines of green, the vehicles as points of blue, buildings yellow. The few pedestrians were bright red. Now, if one of those red dots should suddenly start to move at the speed of a blue vehicle, that would be Roger. But he had had plenty of time to get farther away than the area the copter was covering.

"Tell them to scan the town, General," she said suddenly.

He frowned, but he picked up the phone and gave the order. He didn't get a chance to put it down again; there was an incoming call he could not refuse.

Telly Ramez got up from his chair next to the director and came around to Sulie Carpenter. She didn't look up from the folded transcript of the simulation. He waited patiently.

The director's call was from the President of the United States. They would have known that from the sweat that rolled down beneath Scanyon's temples, even if they had not seen Dash's tiny face in the screen on the director's desk. Faintly the voice leaked through to them: "... spoke to Roger he seemed — I don't know, disinterested. I thought it over, Vern, and then I decided to call you. Is everything going all right."

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Scanyon swallowed. He glanced around the table and abruptly folded up the privacy petals on the phone; the image dwindled to postage-stamp size. The voice faded to nothingness as the sound was transferred to a parabolic speaker aimed directly at Scanyon's head, and Scanyon's own words were swallowed by the petal-like shields. The rest of the room had no difficulty in following the conversation; it was written very clearly on Scanyon's face.

Sulie looked up from the transcript at Telly Ramez.

"Get him off the phone," she said impatiently. "I know where Roger is."

Ramez said, "At his wife's house."

She rubbed her eyes wearily. "I guess we didn't need a simulation for that, did we? I'm sorry, Telly. I guess I wasn't keeping him on the hook as firmly as I thought I was."

They were right, of course; we had known that for some time. As soon as Scanyon got off the phone with the President, the security office called to say that the bugs in Dorrie's bedroom had picked up the sound of Roger coming in through the window.

"We can send a man in, General," the assistant security chief suggested. "There are two of our men in that car out in front of the house, there." The helicopter pickup had slid across the screen and settled at 1800 feet over the courthouse square in the city of Tonka. The camera was set for infrared, and in the upper corner of the screen the broad dark band of the ship canal identified the edge of the town. A rectangle of darkness surrounded by the moving lights of cars just below the screen's center point was the courthouse square, and Roger's home was marked with a tracer star in red. The assistant reached up and touched the blob of light nearby to show that car. "We're in voice contact with them, General," he went on. "They didn't see Colonel Torraway go in."

Sulie stood up. "I don't recommend it," she said.

"Your recommendations aren't too popular with me right now, Major Carpenter," Scanyon snarled.

"All the same, General —" She stopped as Scanyon raised his hand. From the speaker Dorrie's voice came faintly:

I want a cup of tea. And then Roger's: *Wouldn't you rather I made you a drink?* And her almost inaudible *No.*

"All the same," Sulie spoke up, "he's stable enough now. Don't screw it up."

"I can't let him just sit out there! Who the hell knows what he'll do next? *You*?"

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"You've got him spotted. I don't think he'll move, anyway, not for a while. Don Kayman's not far from there, and he's a friend. Tell him to go get Roger."

Do you want some tea?

No .... No, thank you.

"And turn that off," Sulie added. "Leave the poor bastard a little privacy."

Scanyon sat slowly back in his chair, patting the top of his desk with both hands at once, very gently. Then he picked up the phone and gave orders.

"We'll do it your way one more time, Major," he said. "Not because I have much confidence. I just don't have much choice, either. I can't threaten you with anything. If this goes wrong again, I doubt I'll be in a position to punish anybody. But I'm pretty sure *somebody* will."

Telesforo Ramez said, "Sir, I understand your position, but I think this isn't fair to Sulie. The simulation shows that he has to have a confrontation with his wife."

"The point of a simulation, Dr. Ramez, is that it should tell you what's going to happen *before* it happens."

"Well, it also shows that Torraway is basically pretty stable in every other respect. He'll handle this, General."

Scanyon went back to patting his desk.

Ramez said, "He's a complicated person. You've seen his Thematic Apperception Test patterns, General. He's high in all the fundamental drives: Achievement, Affiliation — not quite so high in Power, but still healthy. He's not a manipulator. He's introspective. He needs to work things out in his head. Those are the qualities you want, General. He'll need all that. You can't ask him to be one person here in Oklahoma and another person on Mars."

"If I'm not mistaken," the general said, "that's what you promised me, with your behavior modification."

"No, General," the psychiatrist said patiently. "I only promised that if you gave him a reward like Sulie Carpenter he'd find it easier to reconcile himself to his problems with his wife. He has."

"B-mod has its own dynamics, General," Sulie put in. "You called me in pretty late."

"What are you telling me?" Scanyon asked dangerously. "Is he going to crack up on Mars?"

"I hope not. The odds are as good as we know how to make them, General. He's cleaned up a lot of old shit; you can see it in his latest T.A.T.s. But six days from now he'll be gone, and I won't be in his life any more. And that's wrong. B-mod should *never* be cut off cold turkey. It should be phased out — a little less of me being around and

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then a little less than that, until he's had a chance to build up his defenses."

The gentle patting on the desk was slower now, and Scanyon said, "It's a little late to tell me that."

Sulie shrugged and did not speak. Scanyon looked thoughtfully around the table.

"All right. We've done all we can here tonight. You're all dismissed until eight — no, make that ten in the morning. By then I expect every one of you to have a report, no more than three minutes long, on where your own area of responsibilities stands, and what we should do."

Don Kayman got the message from a Tonka police patrol car. It swooshed up behind him, lights flashing and siren screaming, and pulled him over, to order him to turn around and go back to Roger's apartment.

He knocked on the door with some trepidation, unsure of what he would find. And when the door opened, with Roger's gleaming eyes peering out from behind it, Kayman whispered a quick Hail Mary as he tried to look past Roger into the apartment — for what? For the dismembered body of Dorrie Torraway? For a shambles of destruction? But all he saw was Dorrie herself, huddled in a wing chair and obviously weeping. The sight almost pleased him, he had been prepared for so much worse.

Roger came along without argument. "Good-by, Dorrie," he said and did not wait for an answer. He had trouble fitting himself into Don Kayman's little car, but his wings folded down.

They were silent until they were almost at the project. Then Don Kayman cleared his throat. "You had us worried."

"I thought I would," said the flat, Cyborg voice. The wings stirred restlessly, writhing against each other like a rubbing of hands. "I wanted to see her, Don. It was important to me."

"I can understand that." Kayman turned into the broad, empty parking lot. "Well?" he probed. "Are things all right?"

The Cyborg mask turned toward him. The great compound eyes gleamed like faceted ebony, without expression, as Roger said: "You're a jerk, Father Kayman, sir. How all right can they be?"

Sulie Carpenter thought wistfully of sleep, as she might think of a vacation on the French Riviera. They were equally out of the question at that moment. She took two caps of amphetamines and a B-12 injection, self-administered into the places in her arm she had learned to locate long ago.

The simulation of Roger's

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reactions had been compromised by the power failure; so she did it over again from punch-in to readout. We were content that this should be so. It gave us a chance to make a few corrections.

While she was waiting she took a long, hot soak in a hydrotherapy tub, and when the simulation had run, she studied it carefully. She had taught herself to read the cryptic capital letters and integers, to guard against programming errors, but this time she spared the hardware no time and went at once to the plain-language readout at the end. She was very good at her job.

That job did not happen to be ward nurse. Sulie Carpenter had been one of the first of the aerospace female doctors. She had her degree in medicine, had specialized in psychotherapy, all the myriad ecletic disciplines of it, and had gone into the space program because nothing on Earth seemed really worth doing to her. After completing astronaut training she had come to wonder if there was anything in space that was worth doing, either. Research had seemed at least abstractly worth while, and so she had applied for work with the California study teams and got it. There had been a fair number of men in her life, one or two of them important to it. None of them had worked out. That much of what she had told Roger had been true; and after the most recent bruising failure she had contracted her area of interest until, she told herself, she grew up enough to know what she wanted from a man. And there she stayed, sidetracked in a loop off the main current of human affairs, until we turned up her card out of all the hundreds of thousands of punched cards, to fill Roger's need.

When her orders came, wholly without warning, they were directly from the President himself. There was no way she could have refused the assignment. Actually she had no desire to. She welcomed the change. Mother-henning a hurting human being stroked the feel-good centers of her personality; the importance of the job was clear to her, because if there was any faith in her it was in the Mars project; and she was aware of her competence. Of competence she had a great deal. We rated her very high, a major piece in the game we were playing for the survival of the race.

When she had finished with Roger's simulation, it was nearly four in the morning.

She slept a couple of hours in a borrowed bed in the nurses' quarters. Then she showered, dressed and put her green contact lenses in. She was not happy with that particular aspect of her job,

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she reflected on the way to Roger's room. But when she entered the room she was smiling. "Lovely to see you back. We missed you. How was it, running around on your own?"

"Not bad at all," said the flat voice. Roger was standing by the window, staring out at the blobs of tumbleweed lumping and bouncing across the parking lot. He turned to her. "You know, it's all true, what you said. What I've got now isn't just different, it's better."

She resisted the desire to reinforce what he had said, and she only smiled as she began to strip his bed. "I was worried about sex," he went on. "But you know what, Sulie? It's like being told I can't have any caviar for the next couple of years. I don't like caviar. And when you come right down to it, I don't want sex right now, either. I supposed you punched that into the computer? 'Cut down sex drive, increase euphoria'? Anyway, it finally penetrated my little brain that I was just making trouble for myself, worrying about whether I could get along without something I really didn't want. It's a reflection of what I think other people think I should want ...."

"Acculturation," she supplied.

"No doubt," he said. "Listen, I want to do something for you."

He picked up the guitar, propped himself against the window frame with one heel against the sill, settled the instrument across his knee. His wings quietly rearranged themselves over his head as he began to play.

Sulie was startled. He was not merely playing; he was singing. Singing? No, it was a sound more like a man whistling through his teeth, faint but pure. His fingers on the guitar strummed and plucked an accompaniment while the keening whistle from his lips flowed through the melody of a tune she had never heard before.

When he had finished she demanded, "What was *that*?"

"It's a Paganini sonata for guitar and violin," he said proudly. "Clara gave me the record."

"I didn't know you could do that. Humming, I mean. Or whatever it was."

"I didn't either, until I tried. I can't get enough volume for the violin part, of course. And I can't keep the guitar sound low enough to balance it, but it didn't sound bad, did it?"

"Roger," she said, meaning it, "I'm impressed."

He looked up at her and impressed her again by managing a smile. He said, "I bet you didn't know I could do *that*, either. I didn't know it myself till I tried."

At the meeting Sulie said flatly, "He's ready, General."

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Scanyon had managed enough sleep to look rested, and enough of something else, some inner resource or whatever, to look less harried. "You're sure, Major Carpenter?"

She nodded her head. "He'll never be readier." She hesitated. Vern Scanyon, reading her expression, waited for the amendment. "The problem, as I see it, is that he's right to go *now*. All his systems are up to operating level. He's worked through his thing with his wife. He's ready. The longer he stays around here, the more chance that she'll do something to upset his balance."

"I doubt that very much," said Scanyon, frowning.

"Well, she knows what trouble she'll be in. But I don't want to take that chance, I want him to move."

"You mean take him down to Merritt Island?"

"No. I want to put him on hold."

Brad spilled coffee from the cup he had been raising to his lips. "No way, sweetie!" he cried, genuinely shocked. "I have seventy-two more hours testing on his systems! If you slow him down I can't get readings —"

"Testing for what, Dr. Bradley? For his operating efficiency, or for the sake of the papers you're going to write on him?"

"Well — Christ, certainly I'm going to write him up. But I want to check him as thoroughly as possible, every minute I can, for his sake. And for the mission's."

She shrugged. "That's still my recommendation. There's nothing for him to do but wait. He's had enough of that."

"What if something goes wrong on Mars?" Brad demanded.

She said, "You wanted my recommendation, that's it."

Scanyon put in, "Please make sure we all know what you're talking about. Especially me."

Sulie looked toward Brad, who said, "We've planned to do that for the voyage, General, as you know. We have the capacity to override his internal clocks by external computer mediation. There are, let's see, five days and some hours to launch; we can slow him down so that his subjective time is maybe thirty minutes over that period. It makes sense — but what I said makes sense, too, and I can't take the responsibility for letting him out of my hands until I've made every test *I* want to make."

Scanyon scowled. "I understand what you're saying; it's a good point, and I've got a point of my own, too. What happened to what you were saying last night, Major Carpenter? About not cutting off his behavior modification too abruptly."

Sulie said, "He's at a plateau stage, General. If I could have

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another six months with him, I'd take it. Five days, no; there's more risk than there is benefit. He's found a real interest in his guitar — you should hear him. He's built up really structurally good defenses in regard to his lack of sexual organs. He has even taken things into his own hands by running out last night — that's a major step, General; his profile was much too passive to be good, when you consider the demands of this mission. I say put him on hold now."

"And I say I need more time with him," flared Brad. "Maybe Sulie's right. But I'm right too, and I'll take it to the President if I have to!"

Scanyon looked thoughtfully at Brad, then around the room. "Any other comments?"

Don Kayman put in, "For what it's worth, I agree with Sulie. He's not happy about his wife, but he's not shaken up, either. This is as good a place as any for him to go."

"Yeah," said Scanyon, gently patting the desk top again. He looked into space and then said, "There's something none of you know. Your simulation isn't the only one of Roger that has been done lately." He looked at each face, and emphasized: "This is not to be discussed with *anyone* outside this room. The Asians are doing one of their own. They've tapped into our 3070 circuits somewhere between here and the two other computers and stolen all the data, and they've used it to make their own simulation."

"Why?" Don Kayman demanded, only a beat before the others at the table.

"That's what I wish I knew," said Scanyon heavily. "They're not interfering. We wouldn't have known about it if it wasn't for a routine line check that uncovered their tap — and then some cloak-and-dagger stuff in Peking that I don't know about and don't want to. All they did was read everything out and make their own program. We don't know what use they are going to make out of it, but there's a surprise in it. Right after that they dropped their protest against the launch. In fact, they offered the use of their Mars orbiters to expedite telemetry for the mission."

"I wouldn't trust them as far as I could throw them!" Brad flared.

"Well, we're not going to put much reliance on their bird, you can bet on that. But there it is: they say they want the mission to work. Well," he said, "that's just one more complication, but it all comes down to a single decision right now, correct? I have to make up my mind whether or not to put Roger on hold. Okay. I'll do it. I accept your recommendation, Major Car-

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penter. Tell Roger what we're going to do, and tell him whatever you and Dr. Ramez think you should about why. As for you, Brad —" he raised his hand to ward off Brad's protests — "I know what you're going to say. I agree. Roger needs more time with you. Well, he'll get it. I'm ordering you along on the mission." He slid a sheet of paper closer to him on his desk, crossed out one name on a list, wrote in another. "That's the final crew roster for the Mars launch: Torraway, Kayman, General Hesburgh as pilot — and you."

Brad protested. It was only a reflex. Once the idea had settled in, he accepted it. What Scanyon had said was true enough, and, besides, Brad perceived instantly that the career he had programmed for himself could not help but be enhanced by actual physical participation in the mission itself. It would be a pity to leave Dorrie, and all the Dorries, but there would be so *many* Dorries when he got back ....

And everything else followed as the night the day. That was the last decision. Everything else was only implementation. On Merritt Island the crews began fueling the launch vehicle. The rescue ships were deployed across the Atlantic in case of failure. Brad was flown to the Island for his fitting, with six ex-astronauts detailed to cram in all the touchup teaching he needed and could get in the time available. Hesburgh was one of them, short, sure and smiling, his demeanor a constant reassurance. Don Kayman took a precious twelve-hour relief to say good-by to his nun.

With all of this we were quite content. We were content with the decision to send Brad along. We were content with the trendline extrapolations that every day showed more positive results from the effect of the launch on world opinion and events. We were content with Roger's state of mind. And with the NPA simulation of Roger we were most content of all; in fact, that was an essential to our plans for the salvation of the race.

(to be concluded next month)

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MISHMOSH REDUX

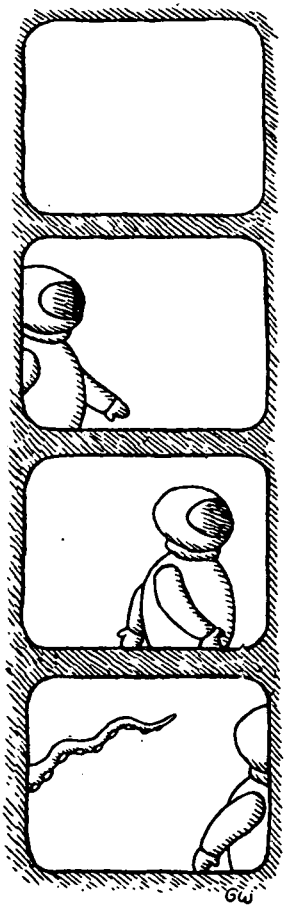
The second month in a row hereabouts with nothing major to talk about...there's all this stuff in the works — word of new projects seems to comein daily — but it's hiatus time for the time being. I can't even bitch about *Space 1999;* it's gone into reruns — though I might mention as indicative that I, who have a high tolerance level for re-reading and re-viewing things that I have enjoyed in one way or another, can't work up the enthusiasm to turn on the TV for those reruns.

So it's bottom-of-the-barrel time. A minor film with some interesting aspects turned up for the first time on TV the other night. Called *UFO Target Earth,* its main claim to fame is that it was made on the proverbial shoestring and brought in a lot of money, mostly from drive-in showings. Now this sort of thing is of interest, for obvious reasons, to the film industry, or should we say, the money people of the film industry. The trouble is that if it, by some chance, is a good film, the filmmaker usually doesn't get to go upward and onward; his reputation is then for making movies cheaply which show a profit.

Finances aside, is *UFO Target Earth* a good movie? Not very, but

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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it does have that quality of intelligence at work that some few low budget films have. The plot is one of those that could go either way, depending on how it was treated: a young college research fellow in Georgia starts tracking down UFO sightings and phenomenon, enlists the slightly reluctant aid of several scientific colleagues, and a female psychic who seems aware of *something* out there.

They do indeed find aliens, though they are never really shown (a clever ploy that doesn't quite come off). Some of the plot is none too clear, the dialogue is often woodenly self conscious, concepts are a little muddy; but it never really insulted my intelligence as many low budget sci-fiers have.

This, however, is not why it cleaned up at the drive-ins. It ends with a "trip" sequence in a blatant bargain basement tribute to *2001;* some not-badly-done artificial images which may or may not work depending on the individual viewer. It didn't for me, but obviously did for the Ford 'n Datsun crowd.

Two films of peripheral interest opened recently. One is *The Man Who Would Be King;* it's a classic romance-of-exploration story of the type that Haggard brought to full flower. Here, two British soldiers of the Empire find a hidden kingdom beyond the Hindu Kush in the 19th century; it's sort of a "lost race" since it dates from the time of the Alexandrian conquests, and is portrayed as a peculiar mixture of Hellenistic, Afghan, Tibetan, and Moroccan (the last because it was filmed in Morocco). The principal city is alovely mixture of lamasaries and Greek temples, and it's excellently produced.

Though *Barry Lyndon* is hardly a genre movie, anything that Stanley Kubrick does is of interest after *2001.* In a curious way here, he's done for time travel what he did for space travel there. *Barry Lyndon* is the best film made in the 18th century — *in* it. I never expect to come any closer to seeing what the world of 200 years ago looked like, and it's not just a matter of good research in costumes and scenery; the entire *style* is of the period, and it is indeed as if Kubrick had managed to cram the film crew into a time machine.

*Late, late show dept....*A few years back I devoted a column to *Dr. Phibes Rises Again,* but if something's good, it's worth reminding people, particularly if it's beginning to show up on TV. Even at a distance of some years, I maintain it to be the wittiest, most stylish horror film ever made, and why there's not a cult going is beyond me. My favorite part of the whole mad stew is probably Vulnavia, Phibes's attendant spirit,

(*To page 143*)

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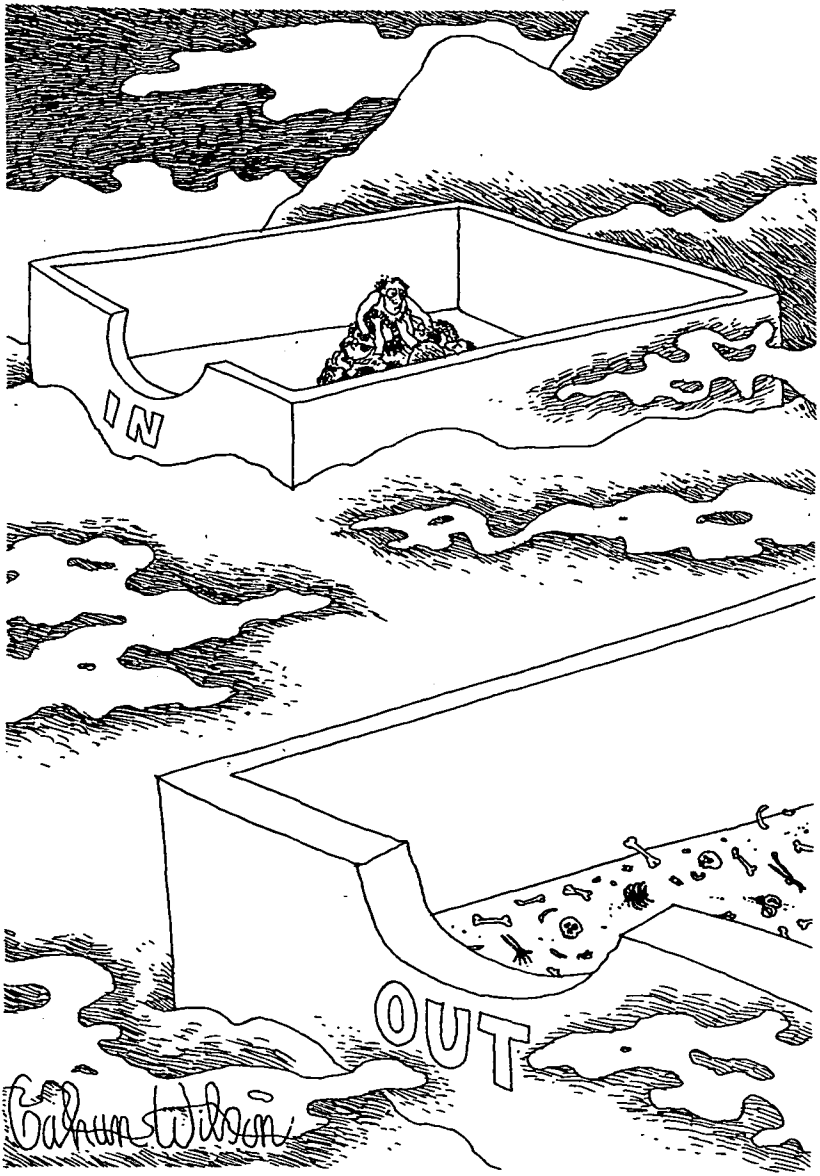

"What is it? What do you see?"

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A curious and absorbing account from the always original Avam Davidson, whose latest book, THE ENQUIRIES OF DOCTOR ESZTERHAZY, has just been published by Warner.

The Account of Mr. Ira Davidson

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

With some apologies to the readers, I must explain that this account, or *Account*, is actually more the work of my younger brother, C. R. Davidson, who has insisted that my own name be attached hereto — "Because," he writes, with his usual modesty, "Because you have arranged it." This will be, then, the second time that experiences of the late Ira Davidson will have appeared in print, as some adventures of his when a boy formed the basis for another story, published in another magazine.* — A.D.

Actual recollections of my Grandfather are, in my own mind, at least, few. My brother used to go to visit the grandparental home a few times a month, by trolley car; but I was deemed too young; and the visits were never returned: once my Grandfather had moved away from a neighborhood, he seldom cared to return. A typical memory might be of the time we met at the home of my Great-aunt Fannie (Mrs. Benjamin Webber). My Grandfather's greeting to me was, "Can you cipher to the Rule of Three?"

Grandmother: Now, Davidson, don't bother him with questions like that, he is only a little boy.

Grandfather: What! I am not even supposed to speak to me own grandchild? (Strikes table with fist, stomps away, furious.)

Grandmother: Sshh, Davidson! Sshh!

Aunts: Now, Pa —

Uncles: Now, Pa —

Myself: (Exit, pursued by a bear.)

It was on another occasion that his temper, "uncertain at best," was displayed at its almost worst. Uncle Jacob — who was not really

* Grandpa and the Iroquois, *COLLIERS, Jan. 4, 1957.*

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an uncle of ours at all, except as a courtesy title, being the brother of Great-uncle Benjamin — Uncle Jacob actually made a statement very sweeping in its inclusiveness, and one which (I now suspect) he had probably read in the New York *Sun*, to wit, that America was very fortunate because most of its great wealth was in the hands of men both moral and religious. My Grandfather at this seemed to go somewhat insane. His head snapped up, his mustache flew out, he pointed his finger at Uncle Jacob and in tones high and almost hysterical he cried out, each syllable separate, *"Ha! Ha! Ha!"* He was not laughing at all.

"Sshh, Davidson, *sshh*!"

"Now, Pa —"

"Now, *Pa* —"

My Grandfather was not a successful man; neither was he in the best sense of the word a philosophical one. His discovery of a means to keep scouring bars from crumbling came along just as America, almost overnight, converted to canned scouring powder. Many years he worked on developing auxiliary propellers for motor balloons; no sooner were they ready for testing than the motor balloon vanished from the heavens, and from history as well. I cannot tell you in details his system for bringing Grand Opera on a subscription basis into every American home via earphones hooked into the telephone; I *can* tell you that it was ready almost to the day that the radio vacuum tube came onto the market; and that after that, The Big Men, who until then had shown every interest, no longer answered my Grandfather's communications nor admitted him to their offices.

As for one or two, or three or four, other inventions and discoveries of his, he summed them up in the fell phrase (which I am sure spoke more of his natural disappointment than of the actual facts): "Stolen from me in the Patent Office!"

And, having said this, he would say one thing more, and he always said it, pointing to himself and crooking his head on one side. *"Condemned by the neck until dead ..."*

The last time I heard and watched him say it was the last time I ever saw him, the one and only time I was ever in his own room. It was after my Grandmother's death. The room was small enough, but he had made space by taking out the bed and sleeping on the floor. Aunts and Uncles protested; but what could they do? Nothing. The quilt was neatly folded in a corner, books and magazines abounded, Grandfather sat in a straight-back chair at a roll-top desk, staring into

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an old notebook. A lodge fez, dusty, with missing spangles, drooped out of a pigeon-hole. "They never forgave me," he said, gazing down.

("Mmm, Pa —")

But I was first: "Who didn't? Why didn't they?"

"Because of what I knew. Because of what I found out ..." His head sank, his chin crept up towards his nose and his mustache flared out. His voice very low, he muttered, "But I would not do it. No, sir, never would I do it. That, I would, by God, never do ..."

"Now, uh, *Pa* —"

Poor old head snapped back up, crooked itself to one side. *"Condemned by the neck until dead."* Such as he was, he was his old self once again. To the end.

A few years ago I spent a couple of days with my Aunt Nettie. Halfway through the second day, and having realized that I was not really any more a little boy unable to cipher to the Rule of Three, Aunt Nettie began opening a few closed doors, metaphorically speaking. Now that my hair has begun to grey, I was told what Great-aunt Maude said to Uncle —— in 1915, and Why (— for instance —). Also, how Cousin —— chartered an airplane, or airplanes, and flew to Peru in 1930, and Why. The Real Reason why a certain Distant Relation obtained promotion in a certain Imperial Civil Service. And so then, for some reason, clued by something I cannot remember, I said, "Grandfather —"

And, as if reading what I myself could not read, namely my mind, Aunt Nettie said, "Yes, I was just about to," and got up and left the room. Returned with something I did not recognize until it was set on the table before me, and I opened it.

What it was, it was an antique loose-leaf notebook, bound in peeling but quite genuine leather. I opened it. Sure enough. The very same one which. "Wouldn't you like to have it?" she asked. "I'm sure that Pa would *like* you to have it." Aunt Nettie did sincerely mean to be kind, but I have seldom if ever heard any statement which I doubt as much as I do that one. Of course I did not say so, and I thanked her without falsehood, because, anyway, I myself liked to have it.

"Now," said Aunt Nettie, pleased. "Wasn't there something else? I think there is something else." She considered a moment. "There is a watch," she said. And added: "But I can't remember where it is."

Later, I called my brother.

"Hey, guess what *I've* got," I began the conversation — an admittedly childish locution. He answered:

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"A certain muscle, formerly part of the Emperor Napoleon, for which L750 was asked at auction at Sotheby's, but failed of sale."

I laughed lightly, knowing his sense of humor. "No," I said. "I've got one of our Grandfather's old scientific experimental notebooks."

He said, "Goody" — rhyming it with "broody," as in, "A broody hen."

"At the top of the first page," I continued, "it says, PROPERTY OF MR. IRA DAVIDSON. CONFIDENTIAL AND SECRET. DO NOT STEAL. —"

"Death Shall Come On Swift Wings," my brother murmured. Or perhaps "mutter" would be the correct word. Undaunted, I went on.

"Did you know that he was working on something called 'Crystal set photography,'" I asked.

"Jesus," he said. Adding, "No."

"I wonder whatever became of that?"

"Stolen in the Patent Office and then suppressed by *Them*. The family luck. How well do I know. Having inherited it. If nothing else. You must take after another side of the family." He paused a moment. "I forget which one," he said.

I chuckled. "Well, I'm going to see if I can figure it out."

"Listen, kid," my brother said, "let well enough alone. Confine your researches to interesting sidelights into the history of the provincial city of Garfield."

"Provincial it may very well be, but there are those of us who love it," I said, staunchly.

"Oh God."

Recognizing that he was under the spell of one of those moods of bitterness which sometimes mar an otherwise admirable character, I thought it best not to prolong the conversation. "Well, I just thought you'd like to know, and if I really find out any thing, I'll call you up —" I said.

"And therein fail not," were his parting words.

Probably the whole matter might be attributed to a desire on my Grandfather's part to entertain the tedium of his research by spinning a good yarn, so to speak. As for the pages and pages of diagrams, I once showed them to my close friend, Mr. Jeremy Knight, a computer expert.

"I couldn't make heads or tails of this," I said to him.

"Neither could anyone else," he commented, after scanning several of the pages — those with diagrams on them, I mean.

Besides these pages, which constitute by far the mass of notes, there were a number of others in my Grandfather's eager, rough calligraphy. Some of them are of a political nature, and have really no

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bearing on this account, or Account; but perhaps they may still be of some use in establishing even approximate dates for the Account, which is otherwise undated. For example, the lines,

"But Ira B.
Davidson, he
Says he *wun't*
Vote fer Governor C.",

evidently refer to Calvin Coolidge, who had been the Governor of Massachusetts. A few other references to a "Governor S." almost certainly mean Alfred E. Smith, once Governor of New York. "Great Eng." must be Herbert Hoover, "the Great Engineer," (and a scholar of by no means slight attainments, as witness his translation from the late Latin of Georgius Agricola's *De Re Metallica*). And there can't be any doubt that "Pop. Ch. A." or "Sen. A." is Senator Magnus Abercrumbie, sometimes called "The old Champ" or "the Peoples' Champion" or "The last of the Populists."

Purely for purposes of a smoother flow of narrative I am going to do what I never did or even thought of doing before in my life, and that is to call the protagonist of this Account by his first name. And I am not going to interrupt this same flow to distinguish what he saw, or what he *said* he saw, and put down in writing, from what he thought he saw and or pretended he had seen and illustrated with what are really very small and *very* rough little sketches — some in margins, some in between lines of text. I suppose that there must have been antecedent notes of the experiment. I do not suppose that Ira *began* his intense interest in and experiments with the notion of Crystal Set Photography already full-grown, but if there were other notes, they have not survived. I may wonder if even these ones would have done so, had they not been preserved in a binder of such obviously good quality.

So we don't know what Ira exactly had in mind when the Account begins. If we could make sense out of the diagrams — but we can't. What we know is that on a date, or day and *time* of day, not too helpfully set down as *Wed. afternoon*, a "wet plate" had cracked, and there were no replacements at hand. It was just then that, perhaps glancing up and around in exasperation, he observed a confluence of moving blurs within his crystal. This struck him enough so that he made almost the first of the sketches mentioned above. (The very *first* actual sketch was of a cat, perhaps one belonging to the family, and which anyway needn't concern us here.) Moving blurs and moving *lines*. The general effect resembles some of the less

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picturesque of the cave paintings.

Intrigued at this unexpected and unexplained effect, Ira began to reorganize, or, perhaps, organize, his equipment; and in this he was somewhat successful, but whatever it was which he was seeing seemed to be very far away. It occurred to him — and, I confess, it would never have occurred to *me* — that if he could get hold of a telescope or a set of binoculars —

He did. But evidently nothing more was to be seen. The notebooks continue with more diagrams, more diagrams, and more and more diagrams. Then comes another dating. *Wednesday afternoon.* He looked through his binoculars, and, for the first time, saw clearly. A group of men were dressing, in a room somewhere; not, indeed, from a state of complete nudity, but out of street clothes and into more formal wear: frock coats or cutaways or something of the sort, so much more common then than now. And, to his even greater surprise, they began to put on something entirely unfamiliar, something which was attached with a sort of harness arrangement.

And then the scene vanished. That is, the entire scene vanished.

Fortunately, by this time Ira's children were all grown and married, although how he was able to support even himself and his wife, whilst spending his days tinkering with such absurd conceptions as "Crystal set photography," is itself a mystery. I suppose that he must have had some savings and or investments. That his mind was agitated by *some*thing, we may imagine from the brevity of the diagrammatic notes intervening between the above-noted, or second, sighting, and the next reference: *Wednesday afternoon.*

This time, and after sundry adjustments and improvements to his equipment, he saw, through what we as children still called "spy-glasses," the group of men full-face-on. And he felt that they all looked like high-school principals! I don't really know what sort of an image this may conjure up for others, but to me the picture is instant and vivid. The men are all spare; all wear thin-rimmed eyeglasses, have sandy to grey hair and mustaches; all of them have mustaches, the full yet neatly trimmed mustaches of a certain period in American history. Their hands are hard and bony, neither calloused nor soft, limp: hard! Their manner is crisp, curt. *"This won't do!"* they seem to say. Or, *"We can't do that!"* and, *"We can't allow that!" "You should have known that!" "We cannot make any exceptions!"* And, also, *"You have already been allowed extra time!"*

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(In case it may seem that I am reading too much into a single phrase, I will have to admit, albeit a trifle sheepishly, that there is after all the evidence of the sketches — rough though they are.)

All this is familiar enough, I am sure. But what follows next certainly is not. The men now have on something vaguely resembling blacksmiths' leather aprons, reaching from just below the tiepin to just below the knee, and slashed in a very curious manner, and evidently decorated with very curious designs here and there. — This, you will recall, over their formal clothing! — And, what is more, and is more unusual: the men are evidently dancing!

Here we have eight or ten men, in early middle age and vigorous maturity, dressed (first) as though for an inauguration, let us say, and (secondly) as though for some sort of a fancy-dress ball! — they are ranged in two ranks, and they are moving in their places, running in place, flinging their hands up in unison, flinging their legs up in unison —

Is this some sort of exercise? Something like the sitting-up exercises or the use of the "medicine ball," then so popular, both of them? If so, then why the curious combination of costume? In fact, why *either* element of the costume? Perhaps they were just having some fun? But the expression on their faces belies that, belies that entirely. Their faces are absolutely serious, their faces are in dead earnest. Not a ripple of either embarrassment or amusement stirs those stiff countenances by a hair. Slightly they lower their heads in unison, and each one lifts to each side of his head at the temples a hand with all fingers closed-in except the index finger, which points straight up; simultaneously they lift their feet so that the trousers move up and disclose the high-buttoned, highly polished shoes, lift their legs so that the knees are almost up to, *are* up to the line of the hips: they are prancing — there is no other word for it: they are prancing in place; then they toss their heads, keeping their hands in the same relative position and the same gesture —

Imagine, if you can, a chorus line. And now imagine that the same principle of movement in absolute unison applies, although of course an absolutely different sort of movement, and that instead of young women the line of dancers consists, as I have said, of mature men, the type which one would unhesitatingly describe as the leaders of their communities. They do not smile. They dance. They dance, they dance, they *dance.*

And, always as they dance, they gesture. They move their hands to a

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horizontal position and they pass their hands ever so swiftly across their throats. And now the pace of the dance becomes somewhat swifter. The gestures become more and more bizarre ... the gestures become almost shockingly so ....

Does the expression on the faces change? Not exactly. Yet there is a change — The angle of the faces changes slightly: *No!* It is the angle of their vision which changes. They are looking up, somewhat to the right (to their own left, that is) and above. They are looking up, yet, as it were, covertly. And now for the first time those secure and certain faces begin to show another emotion. Here and there sweat appears on the smooth-shaven line of a jaw. Here and there a mouth opens and does not close. The marks, one would say, of exertion? Of physical fatigue ... nothing more? No. One would be wrong. One would be very wrong.

Now as they dance, their hands out, palms down, their heads bowed as in submission, still those eyes turn up, turn up as though seeking something which they fear to find. And here and there, watching closely, one observes a leg tremble, an arm jerk somewhat from its rigid position.

And Ira, watching, feels the glasses tremble in his own hands, and, although he cannot say why, he feels faint, he himself, not even present at this scene! — feels sickened.

He leaves. The glasses drop away, he lets them fall. He gets up and he stumbles away.

Well, what to *make* of it all? The likeliest explanation is that a too-close application to an impossible endeavor (I refer to the scientific experiment on which he had been working) resulted in loss of sleep, probably; in loss of appetite, probably; certainly to neglect of sound principles of health. With the result that he, Ira, probably — well, that is certainly too strong. One cannot say, *probably*. Let us say that it would not be at all surprising had he suffered from an acute form of eyestrain and that as the result of this he simply *saw things which were not there*. What is certain is that the experiment and the observations were not continued. They were certainly dropped for good. And yet, so strong was the impression left upon his mind that, as we have seen, almost at the last days of his life, he returned again to the perusal of the notes he had made of them.

One thing I suppose I should say in conclusion. My brother had made mention of my own personal hobby. (I can call it no more than that.) He refers to it, not very seriously, as my "researches into

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interesting sidelights on the history of the provincial city of Garfield." It is after all our native city, our own home town; if it is of no great interest to the professional historian, why need it escape the fond attentions of the amateur?

Ira had made one or two noted references (I mean only that he had noted them down) to "Sen. A.," and I have said I am certain that this refers to Senator Magnus Abercrumbie. I am afraid that Senator Abercrumbie has not yet found his true niche in our country's history. He died a disappointed man, certainly. He had perhaps lived into another era, one which was not suited to his hopes. His programs for what he called "The American People's Charter" were certainly not nationally popular in that period of firm faith in an expanding economy free of all governmental trammels. It is doubtful that, even had he lived, he would have succeeded in getting more than a fraction of his Charter into actual legislation. He had made many enemies. Still, who can really say? He was incorruptible. He was convinced. He was eloquent. We cannot forget the shock of his as-yet-unexplained death — in itself and by its manner so doubly shocking to the agricultural and working classes at the time. Nor should we forget the ripples of unease which spread throughout moral and feligious circles later in that same year when it was learned that quite a number of our most prominent citizens, under the guise of acting on behalf of the Securities Registration Committee of the Fiduciary Trust Company, were actually meeting to worship the Devil, in a room hired for that purpose in the Garfield Building, between three and four in the afternoon on alternate Wednesdays (July and August excepted).

COMING SOON

Next month: "Balsamo's Mirror," a brand new fantasy by **L. Sprague de Camp;** "He," a giant fish story by **Alan Dean Foster;** plus first-rate sf from **Stephen Tall** and **Robert F. Young** and of course the exciting conclusion to "Man Plus" by **Frederik Pohl.**

Soon: **A Special DAMON KNIGHT ISSUE,** featuring a new Knight story, "I See You," a profile by **Theodore Sturgeon** and more.

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Here is an unsettling story that seems to be about three comedians who become famous doing impersonations of U. S. presidents and that may give you a tip of who to really *watch in 1976.*

Three Comedians

by HARVEY JACOBS

There were three comedians who met in the Ha Ha Room of the Club Capricorn. They came as the guests of a much older comedian, turned character actor, as famous for his wealth and longevity as he was for his talent.

The three comedians had much in common. They shared professional pride and purpose. They shared struggle and elusive fame. They shared shock and decline.

It was more their clothing than their faces that made the three comedians look like brothers. Each wore a suit, shirt, tie and shoes that "cost plenty" new but were past redemption. Their buttons did not match. Replacements were sewn in the wrong places. Lush fabric showed patches like bald spots. Collars rolled up against their stays. Stains punctuated the designs on their ties. Their shoes were scuffed and heavy with polish. Even their skins looked badly used, and their hair and fingernails.

The eyes of the three comedians held echoes of horror. But their spirits were high. They came on strong. Full of optimism, arrogance and courage.

Before their host arrived, there was no one to challenge their bravado though it was obviously bluff. The semisenile waiter in the Ha Ha Room of the Club Capricorn remembered them as celebrities. The laughs they trailed and the fabulous tips they once left were current in the waiter's mind. Whatever the three comedians said fractured the old man. Each gesture set him vibrating with glee. His acceptance made the three comedians more alive. They nibbled cheese and crackers, sipped martinis and talked about splendid futures.

The festival at the table continued after their benefactor came to join them.

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All commented on his mink overcoat, the magnificence underneath, and especially on his cufflinks of platinum and ruby. He showed them a key and whispered that it was made with silver that had been carried to the moon in the jock of an astronaut. A certificate confirmed the voyage. The silver had been fashioned into that key and a gorgeous lock worn by his wife of sixty years. There were immediate jokes about that, but gentle jokes that made the host glow. He sent back a few one-liners of his own.

Next, the host described the upcoming meal, a menu he had planned himself. The feast had been ordered a week in advance. The three comedians ate shellfish, meat, rich sauces, crisp vegetables, salad, fruits, sherbet. They drank four vintage wines. They were served cordials and brandy and Armagnac along with fat cigars. Their host had stomach problems. He ate moderately, he drank drops, but he encouraged the three comedians to pull out all stops. They ate like there was no tomorrow because there was no tomorrow for them. Their fire was dead, the steam was gone, even the sound of their sizzle was difficult to remember.

After dinner, blowing smoke, the three comedians and their host talked of the transient hotel called success. All had some anecdote to offer. The host, being much less in agony, had a philosophical view of life's ups and downs, of time and change, of "showbiz" itself.

"Your problem, gentlemen, is that you put all your eggs in the wrong President."

The three comedians turned sour for a moment, but then they laughed together.

"Who was it, that filthy-mouth Lenny Bruce who said the shot that killed John Kennedy got you with the ricochet? Not only you, all three of you. Victims of ricochet. Rick O' Shey, a big Irish slob who dies in the good guys."

The three comedians nodded. It came privately to each that their host would torture the price of the meal from them. They were content to pay in the currency of humiliation. They had pocketfulls of that, trunks full, more than they could ever spend.

"Ah, let's all of us cut the crap," the host said from behind his face-lift in a welcome change of pace. "We're all blood brothers. The problem is the present. The problem is survival."

The three comedians moved their chairs closer to the table's rim. It seemed as if the meeting was to be more than social. The host had more in mind than the simple comparison between his tropical prosperity and their frozen fields.

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"You know how I see you? As metronomes ticking in empty rooms."

Again the three comedians nodded. They appreciated the high-class image and were grateful. But it was quickly taken from them.

"Not metronomes. Wind up alarms. Shitty electric clocks with fuzz around the plugs. Not clocks. Used condoms."

The three comedians winced but never complained. They had accused themselves of worse at breakfast.

The host's face lit. "But don't despair," he said. "Use your head. Save your hair."

"Radio," the three comedians said in unison. "Don't despair. Use your head. Save your hair. Use Fitch Shampoo."

Smiling, the host pulled a blueprint from his jacket pocket and unrolled it on the table.

"Do you recognize this?" he said.

The three comedians were confused at first. The blueprint seemed a maze of circles and squares guarded by three robots. Then they saw it for what it was, nothing more than the floor plan for a gas station on the Sunset Strip.

"Marvelous," the host said. "Of course, it's the Fill-Er-Up. Do you have any idea, any concept of the volume of business they do on a typical Saturday night?"

Each comedian had some idea of the enormous volume of business. There was a time when all three owned magnificent automobiles, low and sleek, filled with extras. The first comedian, who had been rich first and poor longest, let out a sigh at the thought of his Ferrari purring now in another life.

His sigh was followed by two others. The host clicked his tongue against his dentures and poured more brandy.

"Use your head. Save your hair," he said. "We're going to knock over the Fill-Er-Up and walk away with a year's worth of Beluga. Do I make myself clear?"

The three comedians sat with glazed eyes. Here was the host suggesting that they conspire to rob a gas station. What a dirty obvious joke. The minute they showed interest, he would press a button, a curtain would lift, spotlights would flash, girls would dance across the table and trumpets would play a fanfare. Then the host would rise slapping his thighs, put on his mink overcoat and leave them in the Ha Ha Room of the Club Capricorn stuck with the check. No thanks.

"I wish it was called something else," the host said. "The Taj

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Mahal. The Hagia Sophia. Anything but the Fill-Er-Up. It's actually hard for me to say that without chucking my food. I was the kind who had trouble asking for Baby Ruth bars when I lived on them. On the other hand, fuck it. It's not so far removed from the First National Bank and Trust of South Podunk. The Fill-Er-Up. Jesus."

The three comedians leaned over the plan. The robots were only gas pumps. The three comedians thought thoughts of High Test flowing through rubberized veins into the parched bodies of low, sleek cars, and they recalled the energy smell of fresh fuel. They perked up. All things considered, they had spent a small fortune at the Fill-Er-Up for gas, oil, tuneups, tires, washes, maintenance and repairs. Getting some back was not a bad idea.

"Understand that I'm not in this for the money alone," the host said. "You are. I'm aboard for the excitement. My hobby is the planning and precise execution of tiny crimes. It's a way to avenge myself on the young, nubile and mobile. I also like the idea of helping you three loosers. Naturally I will take a full share of the profits. There's something very special about spending money earned by rape. Everything I'm wearing tonight was paid for by rape money, every stitch down to the silk socks and underwear. The Fill-Er-Up is an easy heist. But there is some potential danger. Robbing gas stations is our national pastime. Many careers started that way. On the other hand, thousands upon thousands of small-time crooks are recycled in failed attempts on jerkwater one-pump stations in the boondocks. Is your answer yes or no? Will you do it? Do you have a choice?"

The three comedians examined their hearts.

"Good," the host said sensing their positive answer. "I knew we had an act here. Now for the fun part. The details. The *use your head.* The *Fitch.*"

The host loosened his collar and began to describe patterns and rituals at the Fill-Er-Up.

"It's like learning somebody's tune," he said. "Habit orchestrates movement. Oh, screw my puke. Stop me when I begin to sound like an asshole. There, in that corner. That's where they keep the loot. The boodle. Do you know it takes exactly four seconds from that spot to this point, here, where cars feed onto the freeway?"

II

The first comedian looked exactly like John Fitzgerald Kennedy. They were doubles. Rubber stamps. Though produced by

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widely separated sperm and ovum. The first comedian's heritage traced to Middle Europe. There was no Irish branch to his family, nor had the Kennedys any known relatives in Galicia. It is probably that there are just so many human sizes and shapes.

When Jack Kennedy came to prominence, the first comedian tailored his act to include parodies of the Senator, then Democratic candidate, then President. Could he ignore such a gift of fate? Fortunately the nation was receptive to jokes on the First Family. The President had a sense of humor himself. He was young, dynamic, at sexual peak. His wife, Jacqueline, was a whisper, a class version of Marilyn Monroe. Their children were beautiful. The whole clan of Kennedys was fascinating and full of possibilities. The White House rocked with the sounds of intercourse for the first time in memory. America opened its dream life to the Kennedys. They entered the national midbrain rich, wise, compassionate, sensual, immortal. To make fun of these gods was taking candy from a baby. An abundance of gifts is always comic, as easy to tease as the total lack of grace.

No wonder the first comedian's stock soared. He made a record album, followed with a film, appeared on the important television programs and in the finest clubs. He built his act gradually until he had his own Jackie, John-John, Caroline, Bobby, Teddy and Rose. He even had his own trio of musicians to punctuate their sketches with daubs of electronic music.

The girl who played Jackie was a dark, slender beauty who took classes with Lee Strassberg and Uta Hagen. She came to live with the first comedian, and both knew that they had "something good going."

Then, one Friday afternoon, while the first comedian was doing a solo at the Bismarck Chamber of Commerce monthly luncheon, there were screams from the audience. The first comedian learned that the President had been shot in Dallas.

The first comedian ran to his hotel. The gig was a small one, a whistlestop. The rest of the act was on the way to Las Vegas, all but Jackie, whose name was Barbara Plannar. The appearance was a favor to the first comedian's manager, whose uncle lived in the town. While the first comedian ran to the hotel where Barbara waited, he thought of Manolete, the bullfighter, who died in an obscure corner of Mexico. He considered stopping at a nearby church to pray, but instead he kept going. He wanted to be the one to tell Barbara Plannar of the horrible news.

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When he told her she said, "Then we are all dead, aren't we?"

It was a prophetic comment. After that Friday the first comedian couldn't get work. Who would hire him?

His agent came up with an idea. The first comedian would seriously perform an anthology program of John F. Kennedy's words culled from his writings and speeches. "Crisis and Wit" was the name chosen for the reading. It was tried at an Eastern university. At first, the audience responded well, but then a woman began to cry and laugh. Her hysteria infected others in the room, and the first comedian left quickly.

He telephoned Barbara Plannar from a pay booth. She wouldn't comfort him over the phone. She was busy with an Off-Broadway musical and wanted nothing more to do with him. She said it was too depressing, too much rooted in the past, too much like fucking with a ghost.

After that, the first comedian became active with a group intent on searching out conspiracy beyond Lee Harvey Oswald, but the group ran out of funds, if not clues.

When the first comedian came to dinner at the Ha Ha Room of the Club Capricorn, he was about to take a job as manager of a parking lot not fifty feet from a hotel where he once starred at twelve thousand dollars a week plus expenses. The morning his invitation to dinner arrived, his former agent suggested that he consider plastic surgery. The first comedian refused. He had a deadly fear of tampering with his body, of facing a stranger in the morning mirror.

III

While the first comedian faded from prominence, falling backward through air, the second comedian worked like a dog to make things happen his way.

Aside from a certain jowly resemblance to Lyndon Baines Johnson, the second comedian had no phantom physical gift to draw on. Noboby called him a Xerox of the President. He stood before a mirror and made faces. He uttered sounds into his tape recorder. When he was done he came out with a Texas drawl, he hunched his hulking body, he captured the paternal sincerity of LBJ. A respectable amount of time had passed since the quick inauguration after John Fitzgerald Kennedy died. The second comedian got qualified laughs when he tried out his routine in San Francisco. He was encouraged and he was right to be.

The landslide, the *mandate* of 1964 began the second comedian's biggest and best year. Like the first comedian, he expanded his opera-

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tion to include a Ladybird, a Lindabird and a Lucy Baines. The women were dressed as huge chickens, and he himself had the costume of an eagle. When the President exposed his gall bladder to flash cameras, the second comedian was off and running. He was congratulated on making a basically unfunny fellow into a symbol of mirth. It was said that LBJ himself called the second comedian after watching him on the Ed Sullivan show and that the President had nothing but raves.

The world changed. Casualties grew in Vietnam. Napalm roasted straw cities and thin flesh. Riots spilled through American cities. Ghettos and prisons erupted.

The second comedian realized what was happening. His audience told him. The laughter he evoked was partisan, full of hate. Satire was rejected in favor of mockery. The act altered its script depending on location of the second comedian's performance. Heroes and villains emerged where humans once walked. Jokes became flags.

The first comedian was destroyed in seconds. The second comedian was ruined by ooze from history's seams. The end result was identical. He couldn't get jobs. He was too closely identified with a creature who failed the moment of glory, a creature of pathos who retired to a ranch and cooked Bar-B-Que sandwiches. Others picked up after him.

By then, the second comedian had married his Ladybird, who begged him to quit the business and find a new career. The second comedian tried stocks and bonds.

While he specialized not in securities but in commodities, pork bellies, oats, wheat, soy beans, silver, sugar, the second comedian's office faced a wall where the moving tapes of the New York Stock Exchange and the American Stock Exchange flashed past his eyes. The tapes moved at different speeds, jerking along. One afternoon the second comedian found himself laughing, the first time he had laughed aloud in many years. He was laughing at the tapes. Later, his doctor said he was lucky to have escaped a severe nervous collapse.

When the second comedian was invited to dine at the Ha Ha Room of the Club Capricorn, he was recovering from his partial breakdown. His wife worked as a waitress in a topless discothèque. She had splendid tits and did quite well, but thoughts of suicide were not alien to the second comedian, who speculated that death was its own boffo act, his ultimate ace-in-the-hole. He had a recurrent dream of piranha in the Perganales River, which he had never seen off TV, as who had?

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IV

The third comedian learned from experience that options should be kept open as long as possible. It was a commitment that turned moving targets into sitting ducks.

While he aspired to the Presidency, he was content to wait, resigned to delay. He spread his talents over many personalities from many arenas. More a mimic than a comic, he had a wide tapestry of choice.

That way, when Bobby Kennedy died in California and Martin Luther King followed, the third comedian was not boxed in. He simply dropped them from his script.

The temptation of doing the President licked him like a whore's tongue. Friends warned him of the fate of the first and second comedians. He knew them both personally and saw their misery. Yet he made quiet plans.

The third comedian reasoned things carefully. Jack Kennedy was easy. LBJ had a fumbling, hound-dog quality. But Richard Milhous Nixon seemed impossible. This increased the challenge to the third comedian, a strange, withdrawn man who had the ability to concentrate his energies on his goals like the beam of a laser.

The third comedian widened his reputation under the billing of *One's a Crowd.* His critics extolled that here was a man of soft plastic, everybody's carbon copy, who could not only capture the voice and manner but the charisma, the gut-essence of his subjects. One writer called him a human salamander who could adapt to any soul. Another said he was a dimensional looking glass, a natural, a genius.

Like the first comedian and the second comedian, the third comedian made pots of money and swallowed sweet globs of praise. When he finally took on Richard Nixon, *Variety* wrote that he had restored the Presidency to the realm of madness.

Stepping cautiously between puddles, the third comedian stayed away from Pat, Julie or Trisha. When both daughters were safely married, he began to make reference to them and their mother, but the references were without malice.

Cleverly, taking more territory day-by-day, the third comedian absorbed and regurgitated the President until his glossy routine was ninety percent Nixon and only ten percent insurance. He still did Hubert Humphrey and added Henry Kissinger, threw in film and television stars and a few athletes like Joe Namath and Mohammud Ali, but even they were used to strengthen his characterization of

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"Sir Richard the Clear," which was labeled as *classic.*

The third comedian felt some terror when the first "peace" failed in Vietnam and bombs broiled Hanoi, but then a truce was negotiated. The amazing election of 1972, the withdrawal of troops from Asia, deals with Russia and an easing of tensions with China produced an international climate of pause that gave the third comedian complete release to give his talents totally to Dick Nixon.

No sooner had he played his final card than the Watergate affair ballooned. That evolving story began as a bonanza for the third comedian. The idea of secret bugs, of buggers bugged bugging buggers, the cast of clowns, even the ponderous committee fumfering like an elephant, Spiro Agnew's cop-out, all of it was a garden of yuks. But the third comedian sensed danger.

When voices rose against the thought of censure and impeachment, the third comedian's voice rose with them. He pleaded with others that the President should be left alone to accomplish greatness. The tone of Watergate spoiled. The corruption, a mindless, endless corruption of salesmen swept by waves of fieces, corruption without joy or sense of itself, went from global joke to spreading infection. Terminal rot is too close to cancer. The laughs stopped.

If that wasn't enough, the Energy Crisis followed. Minds weighed the values of blood against oil. There was the feeling of power being sucked from the bellybutton of the Republic by Sheiks in dresses.

When Richard Nixon began parodying Richard Nixon and getting his own laughs, the third comedian knew he was finished, in too deep to get out, wiped like the White House tapes.

John Kennedy was murdered. Lyndon Johnson wound out like a watch. But Richard Nixon hung like a decoration out of season. By the time the Christmas Comet Kehoutec came around, the third comedian was dead on his feet. The money was on nostalgia and the occult. A cold winter, followed by a wet spring, left small room for howls. Then the decoration fell and smashed.

The third comedian was down to his last thousand dollars when his invitation to the Ha Ha Room of the Club Capricorn was delivered. He couldn't even afford a new writer with the raised Guild minimums. His only offer was to do the voice of a fish on a Saturday morning television cartoon.

V

On a rather pleasant Saturday night the three comedians found a

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car where their host said it would be waiting.

The first comedian sat behind the wheel. The second comedian and the third comedian sat in back. There they opened paper bags that held masks and pistols. The bags would soon be filled with receipts from the Fill-Er-Up. There was no waste in the host's plan.

Intent on their mission, the three comedians drove toward their destination. None of them really believed that a crime was about to be committed, an armed robbery.

Their host, who was performing overseas for the military, had rehearsed them a hundred times. The deed itself was an anticlimax.

"The art of crime, successful, realized crime, the *Fitch,* is to make the crime boring to the perpetrators," he said, and it seemed that he was correct.

The game plan was so obvious it hardly required strategy. The car would enter the station and stop at the pumps. The first comedian and the third comedian would take the attendants at gunpoint, move them to the office, blow the safe. The second comedian who already wore a Fill-Er-Up uniform would remain to dispense services to any motorist who happened along. Nothing complicated, steak and potatoes. Every nuance had been anticipated. The success of the theft would be communicated to the host through the device of a telegram wishing him solid success in his generous journey.

Abruptly the lights of the Fill-Er-Up loomed. Its fluorescents, though dimmed to save electricity, seemed like festive hangings. The gas station looked like a carnival on the highway. The three comedians shrugged in the egg of their car.

Things went so smoothly the three comedians could easily have been skaters in an ice show. The attendants at the Fill-Er-Up had not the slightest wish to resist or sound alarms. They surrendered like lambs.

The second comedian actually filled two tanks while the other comedians did their stealings. For giving the motorists fuel beyond their ration, he got five dollars over the price. Finally the first comedian and the third comedian came with bags filled with small bills and a satchel of change.

It was then that the three comedians were commanded to surrender by a ring of motorcycle cops who circled the Fill-Er-Up.

They held guns. The police were edgy.

The first comedian, who was first to sense the trap, moved to defend himself. He was shot on the first volley and died without last words. Before he died he had a vision of an old face atop one of the closing motorcycles, a face that

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reminded him of both the waiter at the Ha Ha Room of the Club Capricorn and of the Host himself.

When the first comedian fell in his own blood, the second comedian went limp. His heart tugged. He gasped and turned gray. Police oxygen couldn't revive him. Oddly, his last awareness was that the hand that offered him oxygen, too late, was attached to a body and face that was a ringer for somebody he knew.

Only the third comedian was left.

"Watch that one," said a rusty voice from among the motorcycles. "Watch that one."

The third comedian saw only blurrs. The cyclops motorcycle lights blinded him. He churned his head for a way of escape. Like a quarterback, he had the choice of giving in but also the choice of passing for the touchdown.

He searched his own rooms for a personality suitable to the occassion, a John Wayne, a Clark Gable, the President himself. Didn't they calm riots by playing the national anthem? If he were to recite the oath of office, it might snap the cop brains to automatic attention. He could walk through them into the night. But there was the voice that kept shouting, "Watch that one."

The third comedian's effort to find a face with solidity and impact worthy of Mt. Rushmore was a tremendous performance. High above the Fill-Er-Up, where police helicopters waited, rotor blades made the sound of applause. Down below, while the motorcycles tightened their circle, the third comedian forced his cheeks, nose, lips, forehead, even hair into passable images of Washington, Lincoln, Marcus Welby, Monte Hall and finally Christ. The strain on the third comedian's neurons and synapses took a toll. He began to flash in blues and burgundys while white fire came from his body openings. He sputtered like an atomic pile and finally separated into particles of luminous dust. This rush of energy ignited the Fill-Er-Up, which went with a roar, buildings, pumps and all. It was waste beyond reason.

The motorcycles stopped, the helicopters hovered. There was a cleansing beauty to the scene and a silence reminiscent of the silence after love.

The story was prominent in the evening paper. The same paper carried a tiny review of an act by a fourth comedian whose material was considered promising, if bland.

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PAGES FROM A 22nd CENTURY ZOOLOGIST'S NOTEBOOK
Part 2: the Solution to the red meat problem
by Bonnie Dalzell

Many national traditions suffered as a result of the Mutant Anthrax Epidemic (mentioned in an earlier essay). The two most seriously damaged were the North American, whose members found themselves deprived of steak, and the Latin, whose members were forced to give up the national pastime of the *corrida*.

Sporadic attempts were made in Spain and Latin America to substitute wolves, bears, lions and capybaras for the black bulls of tradition. However the first three beasts, despite their power and ferocity, employed fighting tactics which gave them an advantage over the matador. As the supply of matadors dwindled, so did attendance at the *corrida*. Capybaras, despite their large size for a rodent and long, recurved yellow teeth, refused to charge. Reputable matadore would not enter the ring a second time with them.

Deprived of their traditional entertainment, the masses became first morose, then restless and finally developed a reawakened interest in an earlier blood sport, revolution. Insecure governments desperately poured large amounts of money into the bioengineering of a substitute for *el toro bravo*. Of the many species considered, only three showed promise. The killer whale and man were discarded. The first for humanitarian reasons due to pressure from lily-livered *norte*

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americanos who objected to the use of an "intelligent" species, no matter how predatory, in the arena (in addition the whales were a bit large to be conveniently transported); the second (man) because it proved to be too dangerous. The final animal considered was mutated into *el gallo bravo*, the giant black fighting rooster, and it proved to be perfect. (Fig. 1)

The hot sun beats down upon the incandescent sand of *la corrida*. The *Galleodor* stands awaiting the change of half a ton of angry chicken parts .... But I am no Hemingway, the grandeur and truth of the scene pall when presented in my poor words.

A fortunate side effect of the "Latin experiments," as they were termed was the production of a large red meat animal. When the total mass of the bioengineered birds was increased it was also necessary to alter their digestive systems to allow them to utilize grass as a food source. North Americans were enthusiastic over the great change in the taste of the meat caused by the great chickens' altered metabolisms. Ranching again became possible, and the chickenboy astride his nimble footed quarterrabbit returned to the West. (Fig 2). The Australians refused to substitute the giant birds for their absent cattle, and out of work drovers claimed that it was too great a blow to one's pride to be addressed as a chickenman. In addition, anti-rabbit feelings were still high, leaving the Ausssies dependent upon jeeps for chicken droving.

Finally, since grass is a resistant food requiring much chewing and grinding, the modifications to the mouth of the super poultry resulted in a linguistic change. "Rare as hen's teeth" became a referent to the relative amount of cooking experienced by a piece of meat rather than its scarcity.

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J. Michael Reaves ("The Century Feeling," November 1974) is in his mid-twenties and now lives in Los Angeles. This strong new story is about the residents of a rural town and their reaction to a creature that is beyond the understanding of almost all of them.

The Sound of Something Dying

by J. MICHAEL REAVES

The next morning the blue light and the crackling sound that had filled the night had a dream texture. His midnight fear was gone, and he milked the goats and did his other morning chores. The sun was as ruddy as the packed clay of the road, and the woods were quiet and smelled of green. He noticed for the first time that some of the leaves were turning orange and golden — this delighted him, as did all new discoveries.

It was Saturday, and so he must walk to town and work. The church floors must be swept and the windows washed, for which Deacon would give him eight dollars. Sunday he would sit in a freshly polished pew and stumble through hymns, and Jude would sit beside him and help with the harder words.

So it had been for as long as he could remember.

He picked up a bushel basket of pecans to take to Jude. The trees behind the house had laid a thick knobbly carpet of them in the grass. Jude had told him they were edible, and so he had picked baskets and stacked them on the back porch. With this new basketful under his left arm and a book in his right hand, he started the long walk to town.

Mattie lived only a mile in the other direction, but he had not been to see her in almost three months — he had almost forgotten her. Deacon and Jude had not wanted him to see her again, and Deacon had told him that God did not want him to see her again. And so he stayed at home during the warm slow evenings and read the books that Jude had given him, marking the hard parts lightly with a pencil. He read now as he walked, for he wanted the words to come easy when he went over the pages with Jude. Deacon would shake his

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head and say that a slow thick tongue was God's plan for him, but Jude would be proud.

Mattie had been dark and soft and comforting, but he had not gone back.

It was hard to concentrate on the page, as there were so many sights to distract him. A swoop of blue caught the air with wings and became a bird settling on a branch. He saw a fox, forest-colored, running across the road and into the brush. He had seen such sights before, he was sure, and yet there was always a new feeling when he saw them again. He tried to keep his eyes on the words. Once he smelled the gritty ripeness of something dead.

The north end of town was bordered by railroad tracks almost lost in high grass. The street was empty — he could see everyone congregated about the church at the other end of town. He could not remember this happening before. He sat the basket down near the door and then noticed his reflection in the glass; the warp of the window magnified the lopsidedness of his head. He thought of the children who sometimes cried at the sight of him, and sometimes laughed. In church.

He could hear voices coming from there.

The sun balanced on treetops behind the buildings. He hurried, hoping that Jude or Deacon would be there. He was beginning to feel again the fear of last night, and he wanted to be told there was nothing to be afraid of.

He pushed through the crowd at the door. The people let him pass — one man whose face was vaguely familiar said, "Let old Cottonhead go on — fools rush in, y'know." There was laughter, which he did not mind. He wanted to find Jude — or Deacon, but Jude was the one he went to when frightened.

His earliest memory was finding a spider all shiny black with a drop of blood red, and plucking it from its web because it was beautiful. Jude had given him glasses of fruit juice and kept wet towels on him until the pain stopped lashing in his legs and gut. This memory was beginning to fade, but others would take its place, and Jude would always be his friend.

There were more people inside. The size of the crowd was intimidating — everyone in town and all the surrounding farms must be there. He saw Jude standing next to the pulpit and went quickly to his side. Jude was the only one who was larger than he, and he felt secure beside him. Jude was dark, bearded and massive — he cast a shadow like a forested mountain. "Hey, Jeremy," he said. "You come to see her too?"

His fear was gone now that he

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was with Jude. "Sweep," he said. The word was heavy, with ragged edges. "Sweep." How could he clean with the church full of people?

"Ain't no cleaning today, Jeremy. Big excitement today. Biggest thing this rink-dink town's ever known. You come along, I'll show you what's got everyone out."

He led Jeremy to the broom closet behind the podium. Deacon stood there — he seemed to be guarding the door. Deacon was kind eyes and a cruel grip. He was thin and always dressed gray, with hair to match. One hand was clenched around his cane like a knot on an aspen branch. At the far end of Jeremy's memory was Deacon noticing a purple welt that Mattie had left on his neck. Deacon had used those eyes and that grip to bring her name from him — then, with tears in his eyes, he had used the cane.

He clutched a handkerchief in the other hand and dabbed at his nose with it.

"You feeling any better?" Jude asked him.

"Worse. Pray Heaven I haven't picked now to come down with the flu — now, with a demon in our midst." Jude smiled with one side of his mouth. Jeremy stared at Deacon. His nose was red and his voice thick. He wondered what had happened — had a spider bit Deacon?

Deacon smiled at him. "I had a dream about you not long gone, Jeremy. The Lord speaks to us in dreams, you know, and sometimes tells us of His plans for us." Jeremy wanted to ask what had happened to him in the dream. Deacon had often told him that he was a part of God's all-pervading plan, and he had felt proud, though he was not sure he understood.

But Deacon had turned back to Jude now and was saying, "I suppose you intend to show the boy this servant of hell. I'm against that, Jude. No telling what effect it might have on him."

"Well, how do you know it ain't God's idea for something to affect him? Better'n having him bored to the grave by living in this jerkwater."

"No one's holding *you* here," Deacon said.

"Nor you. Nor anyone. Why don't we all leave?" Jude stared at the locked door. "Someday," he said quietly. Deacon sniffed. "Open the door, Deacon," Jude said.

"I've told you how I feel."

"So let it be on my head, for all that's worth. Got the critter all bound up, she's harmless."

"Demons are never harmless!"

Jeremy hardly heard the argument. He was staring at the door. He felt both eager and apprehensive; there was something new here,

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new and also unknown. The familiar door of the closet now seemed ominous.

"Open the door," Jude repeated. "Just once, Deacon, let him see something outside his back yard."

"I've always let you have more than your say concerning Jeremy," Deacon said in a low voice. "I've agreed to let him live alone and work for his keep. But this time, Jude, no."

Jude said easily, "Then I'll kick it off its hinges."

They looked at each other silently. Then, his mouth a straight line, Deacon handed Jude the key.

Jude unlocked the door and peered around it, then swung it open. The first thing Jeremy saw was a large silver crucifix hanging from the light fixture. Jude choked on a laugh as he noticed it.

But there, in the corner ....

She was huddled in a crouch. Jude turned on the light and she hid her eyes behind bound, furry hands. She was all over fur; it lengthened on her scalp and surrounded ears that had pointed lobes. It grew fine as moth's hair right to the tips of her fingernails. It was a soft sable color, with blue shading where light touched. She was clothed in a piece of red material, as glossy as the choir gowns hanging above her; it covered from groin to narrow shoulders. She was barefoot, and her feet looked somehow like hands.

Jeremy heard Jude explaining from a great distance: "... blue light, and a sound like the forest afire — probably you heard it. Seemed all over the sky. Well, afterwards old MacCann said he saw her come running from the woods across his truck patch, all lit up with that same blue glow. He took a shot at her and missed, but Donnigal jumped out of the barnloft — sleeps up there when it's hot — and tackled her. Not sure if I'd try that ... says when he did the blue glow went out and she started clawing his shirt up. Missed the skin. Lucky," and he seized both slim hands in a massive grip and pulled them away from her face. "Look here." He carefully uncurled her fingers, and Jeremy saw that the nails were ridged lengthways, leaving a blackness the shape of a kitten's pupil between finger and nail. As he looked, talons like rose thorns filled the spaces. They glistened with a tarry substance.

"Poison probably," Jude warned him.

Jeremy looked at her face. The fur grew in fine strokes up to her wide-set, squeezed-shut eyes. It was velvet across her broad nose. She opened those eyes suddenly, and he was surprised by irises of silver, like

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the reflection of running water trapped there.

"She," he said softly.

"Well, 'she' like a cat's usually 'she,' regardless," Jude said. "Not sure what she is, really. Or where she came from." He chuckled. "'Cept Deacon — he's sure."

Jeremy could see resignation and despair in the inhuman face, as plain as the fur-tufted cheeks. He thought of a fox running free across the road, and he reached out to barely touch her arm. The fur was soft as young squirrel pelt, and his hand was trembling.

She sneezed. It shattered something fragile within him, and he jerked his hand away. The sneeze was followed by a cough, and then she was still again.

"She's spooky — I feel it too. C'mon, Jeremy." Jude added in a low voice. "Got all sorts of doctors and scientists coming from the state university to see her ... I'll make sure they see you, too. Might could be they'll know how to — well, help you. Or where help might be had. Let's go, now."

But he did not want to leave. Here was something — some*one* — he had never seen before, and suddenly he knew that everything he had thought of as "new" before did not deserve the word. He wanted to say something to her, to make her understand how he felt. He tried, and the word that came out was:

"Help ...."

Deacon looked around the door. "I need words with you, Jude." He sneezed.

"You run along, Jeremy," Jude ordered. "Be with you directly."

And so he left the closet and stood quietly near the podium, waiting. He could half hear Deacon and Jude talking, but he paid little attention. He felt as if tiny hooks were at work within him, detaching parts almost painlessly and letting them drop a long way to his feet. He was thinking of supple limbs that did not belong cramped against the hard straight walls of the closet ....

"— an upstanding man, my brother, in many ways a fine man, but you must know your place on Heaven's Earth. Kathy charged us both with protecting her boy, and nothing but harm can come from your tampering with his head. God intended he be —"

And the hurt, the resignation in her face — that was what pressed against the back of his eyes, that was what made him want to put a fist through the whitewashed wall. He was filled with something that was not pain, and yet it hurt; he did not like it, and yet he did not want it to stop ....

"— your nephew as much as mine, Deacon! How can you hold him to living without his mind or memory? Could be those doctors coming could fix that squeezed

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lump of brains. This church got the money, Deacon —"

Deacon had told him of *right* and *wrong*, and of how God watched from above and punished people who did not do the right things. It was not right, her being kept in that closet. And yet it could not be wrong, for Jude and Deacon had allowed it. It was hard to think, because there were annoying snatches of talk and laughter all about him ....

Jeremy looked up and saw he was standing behind the pulpit. Before him were the faces of the townsfolk, like melons in a field. Some were laughing, and some looked sad. He was gripping the edges of the pulpit with thick fingers, and he was suddenly aware that in his concentration drool had wet his chin. He dragged his sleeve across his face and clumped to the side door — he had to think, and they were distracting him. He heard Jude call "Jeremy!" and he fumbled with the knob, pushed it, pulled it, opened the door and left them.

For a moment it seemed that the laughter had followed but it was only the wind in the woods so near the church. He saw there were still pools of people near the front, and so he walked around to the back. He paused by an open window. He could hear Deacon talking to those inside:

"We are bringing outsiders into our town, we are jeopardizing our peace. Rather than have that, I say we should destroy this creature — that from fire it came, and by fire should it go —"

He walked to the edge of the woods and sat down. He felt something burning inside him.

"Jeremy," Jude said.

He looked up to see the big man beside him. "Jeremy, try and understand this: Deacon loves you too, no matter how it seems at times. He just sees things different from me and you. When those doctors tell him they can fix you up, I'm sure he'll stop waiting for God to do it."

He was not interested in that. "She?"

Jude blinked. "Well, what about her?"

He hugged himself, rocking back and forth in concern. "Wants to burn her," he rumbled.

"Deacon? Hell, that's just talk. No, we'll just keep her trussed up till we can hand her over to the university people. We wouldn't burn her at the stake, Jeremy — don't you think we got any feelings?"

So many wrong ways to do something, and only one right way. Deacon had told him that. If they were wrong, then what was right?

Had he ever thought of this before? Had anything like this ever

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happened before? He could not remember — there seemed to be many misty things he could not bring into focus ....

He could not concentrate with Jude standing over him. He turned away, made a leave-me-alone sound.

"Damn it, Jeremy, now don't be surly. I can still give you a crack when you need it."

He sat still, afraid to invite punishment, feeling ashamed. The memory of Jude sitting beside his bed, holding glasses of cold fruit juice to his lips, came back dimly. How long ago?

"Jude?" he asked. "When did spider bite me?"

He heard Jude inhale sharply. The big man bent and looked into his face. "About four months ago," he said slowly. Jeremy said nothing. Jude seemed on the verge of speaking again, but instead turned and walked slowly back to the church.

Four months ago.

He knew months; like days, they had names: January, August, April. At home was a large calendar slashed with chalk — each day he carefully crossed off a number, that he might know when Saturday and Sunday arrived. Those square boxes of numbers were months.

Four of them was not a very long time.

He let Jude's words sound again inside his head: *Might could be they'll know how to help you* ... but must he let them have her first?

He did not want Jude and Deacon to be wrong. He sat there for a long time, until the heat of noon was a blanket, until people began to leave the stifling church. He did not want them to be wrong, but he could close his eyes and see the dust and lint on blue-black fur, and he knew that they were.

Finally he went back to the rear door of the church. Deacon was sitting in the front pew, cradling his forehead in his hands. No one else was there.

Somehow he had to make Deacon understand that it was wrong to keep her there, that something so beautiful should not be confined. But his love for this gray man whose smiles came with an effort had always been mixed with fear, and now he found he could not speak. Deacon raised his head and saw him. "Jeremy," he said tiredly. He used the handkerchief. "Boy, I want to talk to you. Those books Jude been having you read lately — is the Bible among them?"

He pointed to the closet door. "Let her go," he said. "Please."

"'Let her go!' That's even less sense than these fools around here wanting the university to have this thing." His voice took on a pulpit tone. "I'll let her go, get I th

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chance. Back to sulfur and brimstone! She's evil, and the Bible tells how to deal with evil .... Jeremy, what're you looking at? You be calm now! Jeremy!"

He could not speak. He could feel his throat swell with the effort, but words refused to come. The frustration made him smash both fists down on the old upright piano. He *must* make Deacon understand!

But Deacon's eyes were wide, and his face mild-pale. "The thing's got a spell on you," he whispered. "Yes, you'd be the first to fall. Kathy's boy — dear God, I'll kill it now, this can't happen!" And then he was at the door, fumbling for the key — it was all wrong, and Jeremy did not know how to set it right — the door was open, and he saw Deacon's cane raised over her. Her scream was like something dying as she twisted beneath the blows, and he seized Deacon from behind, took the cane from him and broke it in two. He did not mean to push Deacon, but somehow the man was lying dark and crumpled in the hallway, just as she lay in the closet. Jeremy looked from one to the other and could not decide to whom to go. So he simply stood there, the broken cane in his hands, and that was how Jude found them.

He sat shivering, his legs against his chest, hiding inside himself. He kept his eyes closed, but could not close his ears.

"*Will* you let me destroy it?"

"No! I've already called the state university, Deacon. Took me near an hour to work up courage to do it, damn near another hour to convince them of it. I'm not putting out all that sweat just to not have something when they get here."

"So." Deacon's voice was like glass in a wind. "What about Jeremy? I tell you, Jude, this comes of trying to make of the boy something he isn't destined to be. He'll have to be confined." Deacon lowered his voice on the last sentence.

Jeremy felt the silence.

"*No*," Jude said.

"Jude, I love the boy as much as you do, if not — I mean — but I've long been afraid something like this might happen. Just until we can remove this evil influence. I'm not saying lock him away forever."

"Deacon," and Jeremy suddenly thought of how big Jude was, how powerful — "Deacon, you say this again, ever, you'll wish you hadn't." Jude turned and Jeremy heard his heavy steps. He took his hands from his eyes.

"Jeremy," Jude said in a gentle voice. "You've said you're sorry. Go along home now, all right?"

He nodded. He touched his jaw tenderly where the purple began.

"I'm sorry I hit you. But what

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you did was wrong, and you know it. We won't say no more on it."

"Isn't right," he heard Deacon mutter as he left. He wondered how Deacon knew. Jeremy had been sure that he was doing right, and everything had gone wrong. He thought of God as a giant, old yet bigger than he or Jude, who sat on a cloud and watched, and punished those who did wrong. He had done wrong, and he had been punished.

He saw the black woman in front of him, but did not recognize her at first. It was when she spoke that he remembered Mattie.

She said, "Cottonhead, where you been? You ain't come to see me none lately," and then he remembered the evenings in the unpainted shack, the creaking springs and the lumps in the feather mattress, the children playing outside. He had felt warm and secure. She smiled at him, her teeth yellow and irregular. She wore a dirty plaid dress that stretched tight across her enormous bosom and hips. He smiled back. Even though he remembered the caning he had received, still he was glad to see Mattie again.

"You come on home with me," she said. She pressed up against him and dug his ribs with a calloused hand. And he wanted to, despite what they said, but it was *wrong*, it was sinful. He dug his boot toe into a crack in the pavement hesitating. It would hurt Jude to know he had gone back to Mattie's. But — Jude had hurt him.

Let it be wrong.

Her shack was much like his own: ill-fitting slabs of gray wood supported by red brick legs. The bed still squeaked, the children still shouted and laughed at play outside. But it was not as he remembered it, because Mattie laughed and teased him, and tousled his hair along the bony ridge on his head. Still, he stayed until the sun was behind the woods, and then she told him to run along home, she had to cook dinner. He left, but did not go home. Instead he followed the road back to town.

All through the afternoon he had thought of her — he had remembered the rope around her wrists and the lost look in her eyes. He remembered Deacon standing over her, the cane rising and falling. He remembered the feel of that cane on his back.

It was very dark when he reached the church. He put one large hand against the door and pressed until the jamb splintered. Inside, he remembered that he had not cleaned today and felt guilty for a moment. Then he went quietly to the closet door, put his hand against it and pushed.

When he turned on the light, Jeremy was shocked at the change in her appearance. The big eyes were now rheumy, and the fur

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seemed to have lost much of its sheen. She snuffled and ran one finger beneath her nose in a very human way. He moved forward slowly. "Won't hurt," he said. She raised her bound hands — the wrists were swollen now. He also saw that the claws had appeared beneath her nails, and this made him stop. Then, moving slowly, he reached forward and touched the ropes.

The talons remained unsheathed while he untied her, but she made no resistance when he picked her up. He turned out the light and moved swiftly from the darkness inside to the darkness outside.

In the night air she seemed very warm, though she was shivering. He took a route through the woods, dead branches sounding like gunshots beneath his feet. He followed glimpses of the moon and finally emerged on the road beyond the tracks.

She had not stirred in his arms, though the branches had scratched her as well as him. Jeremy could feel her heart beating in a strange but regular rhythm — but for that, she might have been dead. The moonlight glistened on matted fur at the corners of her eyes and mouth.

He ran the rest of the way home. The house seemed cold and unfamiliar against the jagged silhouette of the woods. Inside, he put her on the bed, pulled the quilt over her, then changed his mind and took it off again. He lit the oil lamp, and her fur looked dry and brittle. He remembered what Jude had done for him, and soaked rags in well water before laying them on her limbs. Jude had given him fruit juice to drink — he did not have fruit juice, but he had fresh goats' milk in the icebox. He poured a glass and put it to her mouth. She drew back her lips and hissed.

She spoke. Her voice was thick and bubbly. He did not understand her words and held the glass out again. It was all he could think to do.

She looked at him through filmed eyes and muttered something in an infinitely tired tone. Her shoulders slumped and she drank, her mouth twisting at the taste.

He did not know what else to do for her. Jude would know, but he could not go to Jude — he could not go to Jude.

He became aware of a pungent odor and noticed that her garment was damp. He unclasped it at the shoulders and removed it. It stuck between her legs; a pinkish ichor was coming from her vagina. He dropped the garment out the window and washed her with one of the rags, tenderly. Then he had her drink another glass of milk and

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made certain the rags that covered her trembling limbs were wet. That done, he sat down beside her and waited for her to get well.

He waited all night.

Just before dawn, he heard the rattling roar of Jude's pickup truck outside. There came a pounding on his door.

"Jeremy!" Jude's voice.

He looked closely at her. She was barely breathing, had been that way for hours. The pounding and his name came again, this time in Deacon's voice.

They had come to take her back.

Jeremy stood, feeling his insides knotting. Then he heard: "If this is how you want it, Jeremy," and Jude kicked the door open.

He closed the bedroom door and stood before it, facing them.

"Jeremy, Jeremy." Deacon stood in shadows, his voice cold iron. "That creature holds his will, Jude. I told you —"

"Enough, Deacon!" Jude was in front of him, suddenly looming most large and frightening. "Can't go in ...." Jeremy whispered.

"Got to, boy. Those doctors and scientists back at town come a long way to see her. You did what's wrong, but we'll talk about that later. Step away."

He swallowed and shook his head. Jude sighed and put his hands on Jeremy's shoulders to push him aside — Jeremy did the same to him and suddenly they were very still, locked together. For a long moment they stood as though posing ... Jeremy saw Deacon behind Jude, mouth working, but heard nothing except a faraway thunder that seemed to build within his ears. But he was winning, he was slowly forcing Jude back. Then he glimpsed Deacon darting to the door behind him and realized he had lost.

Jude kicked one foot from beneath him and they toppled together, hitting the floor with a stunning impact. He saw the open bedroom door, saw Deacon bending over the bed. "No," Jeremy said — then he heard her make a dying sound of recognition and hatred, saw lamplight gleam on talons. And Deacon screamed.

Everything stopped for Jeremy. In that frozen moment: Jude sprawled beside him, fingers white against the floor; the small black form on the bed, eyes closed, still; and Deacon, his face full of agony, his hand clenched on his wounded arm. "It burns," he said hoarsely — "Dear God, it *burns*!"

He collapsed against the table that held the lamp. Fire splashed across the floor, on the bed.

Jude leaped to his feet and lunged forward, but the straw tick mattress had erupted with flames, and the bedroom was instantly an

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inferno. Jeremy heard him shout "*Deacon!*" and then the flames forced him back. He pulled Jeremy to his feet and pushed him toward the safety of outside.

The bleating of the goats was brassy with fear. They stood watching the pillar of fire rise against the dawn. The heat dried the tears on Jeremy's face. He stood, fingers twisted together, not wanting to believe that Deacon was gone, that she was gone. Hoping that somehow they would come walking out of the orange light and blackened beams, smiling and alive.

After a long time the morning sun was brighter than the flames. Jude looked at Jeremy. His eyes were like flat black stones.

"Deacon's dead, Jeremy."

He did not want to hear the words, but they came again. "Deacon's dead," Jude said, his voice hard. It was true, and so she must be dead as well. He tried to imagine her as he had never seen her, running swift and nimble through the rusty shades of the woods. He could not. He could only see her lying on the bed, her fur dry and lifeless, her eyes closed. And beside her stood Deacon, eyes terrible with the pain of the poison within him. Dying, both of them; and he only was to blame.

"Jude ...."

"Don't talk to me for a time, Jeremy," Jude said. He was quiet then for some minutes, his fists massive against his sides. "Maybe if Deacon had let me send you off to a doctor, years ago ...." He sighed and turned toward the truck. "Come on. One of those doctors told me he'd look you over. Maybe some good can come of this."

Jeremy did not follow him. He closed his eyes, and still they were before him in a tableau of death, mercilessly clear. He opened his eyes and stared at the woods. They were deep and sheltering, and he wanted very badly to plunge into them, to run and hide and wait for memory to grow misty and dim and finally fade away. But he had done wrong, and he knew he must be punished.

He walked slowly toward the truck. He would go with Jude to the doctors, and he would remember.

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IT'S A WONDERFUL TOWN!

On my eleventh birthday, my father presented me with a copy of the 1931 World Almanac — at my request. Of all the presents I've ever received, I think I remember that most clearly. I read the words and used the statistics to make bar graphs, circle graphs, and line graphs for my own amusement.

With that one book, plus a sheaf of graph paper, a ruler, a compass, and a two-color pencil (red and blue), my parents had me completely out of their hair (except when I was working in the candy store) for at least half a year. You couldn't ask for more out of a total investment of about one 1931 dollar.

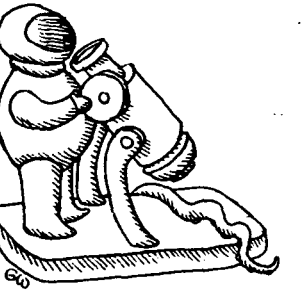
I have never recovered from my fascination with almanacs and have just obtained the 1976 World Almanac (to say nothing of the latest Readers Digest Almanac and CBS News Almanac).

If you go through an almanac carefully and creatively, you can always come out of it with more information than it thinks it is giving you. For one thing, you can always rearrange the information in a new way and make some aspect of its contents more apparent.

And you may be surprised at what you end with. Here, let me show you —

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science



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Any almanac will give you the population of the 50 American states and the District of Columbia, sometimes for each of the Decennial Censuses. Sometimes, they will list the states in alphabetical order, sometimes in order of the present population. I consider the second alternative far the more useful.

If you look at a list of the American states in order of population, you will see at once that there are seven states, each of which has a population less than that of the District of Columbia. There are 42 states that have a population less than that of New York City — only eight states, including New York State, with populations larger than that of New York City.

If we consider the population figures estimated for July 1, 1974 (the latest I have), we find that nearly one out of every ten Americans lives in California. We also find that a little over half of all Americans live in the nine most populous states. California has a larger population than that of the 19 least populous states combined.

But, since this is the Bicentennial Year, let's do something a little more complicated, that involves the magic year of 1776.

When the United States declared its independence, it consisted of thirteen states and had an estimated population of 2,600,000. (The First Census was not conducted till 1790, fourteen years later, and at that time the population was 3,929,000.)

Of course, at the time of independence the thirteen states drew their boundaries with a more lavish hand than they do today. Six of them laid claim to lands west of the Appalachians and all the way to the Mississippi. Virginia, in particular, laid claim to the possession of a total area of 354,000 square miles, 40 percent of the land area of the nation after it won its independence and just about ten percent of its present area.

Such claims were given up in the early years of the Republic and are not important. There are, in fact, only three ways in which the boundaries of the thirteen original states were significantly different in 1776 than they are now:

1) Maryland included the territory now making up the District of Columbia. The District was ceded to the Federal Government to serve as the site of the capital in 1801.

2) Massachusetts included what is now the state of Maine. Maine did not become a state in its own right till 1820.

3) Virginia included what is now the state of West Virginia. The counties of West Virginia seceded from Virginia at the start of the Civil War, or, perhaps more accurately, refused to join the rest of Virginia in

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seceding from the United States. West Virginia was recognized as a separate state in 1863.

The question is, then, what is the population of the thirteen original states (including the parts that were theirs in 1776) today? It is easily answered (Table 1) but I have never seen a specific table of this sort anywhere else.

Table 1 - The Thirteen Original States

State	Population		Increase Ratio
	1974 (est.)	1776 (est.)	1974/1776
1 - New York	18,111,000	233,000	77.7
2 - Pennsylvania	11,835,000	298,000	39.7
3 - New Jersey	7,330,000	127,000	57.7
4 - Massachusetts (& Maine)	6,847,000	328,000	20.9
5 - Virginia (& West Virginia)	6,700,000	515,000	13.0
6 - North Carolina	5,363,000	270,000	19.9
7 - Georgia	4,882,000	57,000	85.6
8 - Maryland (& Dist. of Col.)	4,817,000	220,000	21.9
9 - Connecticut	3,088,000	212,000	14.6
10 - South Carolina	2,784,000	171,000	16.3
11 - Rhode Island	937,000	47,500	19.7
12 - New Hampshire	808,000	97,000	8.3
13 - Delaware	573,000	40,500	14.1
Total	74,075,000	2,616,000	28.3

As you can see, Virginia and Massachusetts, which were first and second, respectively, in population in Revolutionary times (no wonder they were the political leaders of the colonies) are now numbers four and five, and it is the three Middle Atlantic states that are now in the lead.

The three Middle Atlantic states, and Georgia, are the only ones of the original 13 to increase at more than the average rate for the 13. Georgia was a frontier state, and only a small portion of its present area was settled in 1776. Its better than 85-fold increase is understandable.

The fact that New York State increased nearly 78-fold in population is due to the phenomenal growth of New York City. New York City was *not* the largest city in the nation at the time of the Declaration of

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Independence. That honor belonged to Philadelphia, which had a population of some 33,000 to New York's 25,000. It was the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 which represented the turning point. Trade funneled into and out of New York City on the way to and from the interior and in the two centuries of the nation's existence, New York City has increased its population 315-fold, to a 60-fold increase for Philadelphia.

As for the total population of the 13 states, it now makes up 35 percent of the population of the United States, though in area the states only make up 10 percent of the nation.

Incidentally, those six of the 13 original states which were to be among the "slave states" in later American history: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, had about 49 percent of the total population of the 13 states in 1776, but only 34 percent in 1974. I don't think there's any question but that the social and economic consequences of slavery inhibited their growth.

Having mentioned New York City, I want to turn to the cities of the United States next.

We can almost always find a list of American cities in order of population in the various almanacs, but finding data on their areas is something else. Most people don't think of city areas, because cities are usually represented on maps as dots or little circles. When maps contain city-circles in different sizes, or shapes, the more prominent indicators go to the more populous or the more politically significant. Areas are simply never made much of.

Of course, the area of a city is a very artificial thing. The city line can be changed by vote, and suburbs are sometimes brought in for fiscal reasons, or out of sheer boosterism. But then, the mere fact that city lines are artificial, means that population figures are artificial, too. An area just outside a city boundary may be as much a part of the city economically and socially as the area just inside.

Fortunately, the 1975 Readers Digest Almanac gives figures for the area of the 130 most populous American cities, and we can make good use of this. The area of New York City is, for instance, 299.7 square miles*

** I should use square kilometers here, but American almanacs still use square miles, and American people still think square miles. I hate to do all the conversions, but you can do so for yourself if you wish. Just multiply any square mile figure by 2.59 and you will have square kilometers. The area of New York is 299.7 X 2.59 = 776.2 square killometers.*

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New York City covers a sizable area, and it is almost a quarter as large as the state of Rhode Island. Considering that New York City is 2.3 times as populous as the next most populous city in the United States, it might seem logical to suppose that it is the largest in area, too, but that is not so. There happen to be seven American cities (count them, seven) that are larger in area than New York City.

One of them, many people may recall, is Los Angeles, but Los Angeles isn't the largest city in the United States either, in terms of area. There are three larger ones, larger by dint of having arbitrarily shoved their boundaries outward in recent years. How many people would guess, offhand, that the largest city in the United States in terms of area is Jacksonville, Florida. Well, it spreads out over 2.55 times as much as New York City does.

Here's another table then (Table 2) of a kind I've never seen before anywhere. It is a list of the 27 American cities that have an area of over 100 square miles (the Large Cities), taken from the Almanac list of the 130 most populous American cities. They are presented in the order of decreasing size.

Table 2 - The Large Cities

City	Area (sq. m.)	City	Area (sq. m.)
1 - Jacksonville, Fla.	766.0	15 - New Orleans, La.	197.1
2 - Oklahoma City, Okla.	635.7	16 - San Antonio, Tex.	184.0
3 - Nashville, Tenn.	507.8	17 - Tulsa, Okla.	171.9
4 - Los Angeles, Calif.	463.7	18 - Detroit, Mich.	138.0
5 - Houston, Tex.	433.9	19 - San Jose, Calif.	136.2
6 - Indianapolis, Ind.	379.4	20 - Columbus, O.	134.6
7 - San Diego, Calif.	316.9	21 - Atlanta, Ga.	131.5
8 - New York, N.Y.	299.7	22 - Philadelphia, Pa.	128.5
9 - Dallas, Tex.	265.6	23 - El Paso, Tex.	118.3
10 - Phoenix, Ariz.	247.9	24 - Mobile, Ala.	116.6
11 - Chicago, Ill.	222.6	25 - Huntsville, Ala.	109.1
12 - Virginia Beach, Va.	220.0	26 - Columbia, S. Car.	106.2
13 - Memphis, Tenn.	217.4	27 - Corpus Christi, Tex.	100.6
14 - Fort Worth, Tex.	205.0		

Jacksonville, within its present boundaries, has 63 percent of the area of the state of Rhode Island. The 27 Large Cities, taken all together, have

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an area of just under 7,000 square miles, which is about the size of Connecticut and Delaware put together.

Of course, most of the Large Cities are located west of the Mississippi, where land was cheaper than in the more settled east. Six of them are in Texas alone. The only two Large Cities in the Northeastern quadrant of the nation are New York and Philadelphia. The most populous city that is not a Large City is Baltimore, Maryland, which has a population of 906,000, but an area of 78.3 square miles.

Obviously, if a city has drawn its lines in a wide sprawl, it may end up including quantities of wasteland, so that it may still have relatively few people within those lines. On the other hand, a city that is tiny in terms of area may nevertheless be well-packed with people.

What we can do is calculate the population density, the number of people per square mile of city area. For instance, Jacksonville has within its 766 square miles, 528,865 people according to the 1970 census, which amounts to an overall density of 690 people per square mile.* The city of Paterson, New Jersey, on the other hand, has an area of only 8.4 square miles, but its tight-drawn boundary encloses 144,824 people. Paterson holds 17,240 people per square mile. It is 25 times as densely populated as Jacksonville.

I will not try, however, to prepare a density table covering all the towns and cities of the United States. I think it will prove a point if I consider the six American cities that are over a million in population (the Great Cities) and list them, not in order of population, but, as in Table 3, in order of population density.

Table 3 - The Great Cities

City	Population (1970)	Area (sq. m.)	Density (per sq. m.)
1 - New York	7,895,563	299.7	26,347
2 - Philadelphia	1,950,098	128.5	15,175
3 - Chicago	3,369,359	222.6	15,136
4 - Detroit	1,513,601	138.0	10,968
5 - Los Angeles	2,809,596	463.7	6,059
6 - Houston	1,232,802	433.9	2,841

** Divide density figures by 2.59 and you'll have the number of people per square kilometer. Thus, the overall population density of Jacksonville is 690/2.59 = 266 people per square kilometer.*

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As you see, New York is the most densely populated of the large cities. It is 9.3 times as densely packed with people as Houston is. In fact, I strongly suspect that there is no American city that has a population density even close to that of New York City. One can deduce this if only from the fact that no other city is as packed with high-rise apartments.

If we wish to include foreign cities, however, the teeming East has some antheaps, too, even without the benefit of high-rise apartment houses. Consider Macau, for instance, which is frequently advanced as a case of amazing population density. Macau is a Chinese city, near Canton, which is a Portuguese possession. It has an area of but 5.99 square miles, but crowded within those few square miles are 249,000 people, according to a 1970 census. That makes the population density of Macau about 41,500 people per square mile, which is 1.5 times that of New York.

We are talking now of overall population densities, however, and within any city there are always relatively crowded areas and relatively empty ones. It may not always be easy to parcel a city into discrete units that make sense in order to compare densities, but in the case of New York City, there is no problem.

New York City is made up of five boroughs, each of which is a separate county of New York State. The separate boroughs — Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island — are quite familiar to the rest of the nation since they are so frequently mentioned in books, plays, motion pictures, songs, and so on.

Each of the boroughs is, in itself, a well-populated area. Four of them, in fact, would be among the Great Cities, if each were counted separately and one would be a large city. Table 4 shows what a list of the American Great Cities would be like if the five boroughs of New York City were separate cities.

Table 4 - The Great Cities (New York broken up)

City	Population (1970)
1 - Chicago	3,369,359
2 - Los Angeles	2,809,359
3 - Brooklyn	2,602,012
4 - Queens	1,987,174
5 - Philadelphia	1,950,098
6 - Manhattan	1,539,233
7 - Detroit	1,513,601
8 - Bronx	1,471,701
9 - Houston	1,232,802

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Next, let's confine ourselves to the boroughs and prepare Table 5, showing their population densities.

As you see, the island of Manhattan has an overall population density about 1.7 times that of Macau, and maintains that density over an area 3.67 times that of Macau.

Another way of looking at it is this. Manhattan is the smallest county in the United States. The nation's largest county is San Barnardino, California, which has an area of 20,119 square miles. This is 914 times as large as Manhattan and is almost as large, in fact, as the state of West Virginia. That enormous county, however, is mostly the Mohave Desert, and its total population is 681,535, less than half of the tiny island of Manhattan.

Furthermore this is the population density of Manhattan *residents* (of whom my wife and I are two), the dead of night density. During the day, people flood into Manhattan from the outlying boroughs, from Westchester, from Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut. I suspect that the population density of Manhattan at noon may reach the 100,000 per square mile mark.

Table 5 - The Boroughs of New York

Borough	Population (1970)	Area (sq. m.)	Density (per sq. m.)
1 - Manhattan	1,539,233	22	69,965
2 - Brooklyn	2,602,012	70	37,171
3 - Bronx	1,471,701	40	36,793
4 - Queens	1,987,174	105	18,925
5 - Staten Island	295,443	63	4,690

A density of 100,000 people per square mile is a hard thing to visualize. If the state of Delaware (second smallest in the nation) were packed with people at this density, it would contain the entire population of the United States. If the state of Kentucky were packed with people at this density, it would hold every man, woman and child on Earth.

I doubt that there is anywhere in the world a place where the population density is higher than in Manhattan at noon, under ordinary day-to-day conditions, or *can* be, at the present level of technology. If there are portions of Tokyo or Shanghai (the only two cities with populations greater than New York) with a higher population density, then we might

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ask if it were accompanied by as high a standard of living as exists in Manhattan.

In this sense, the island of Manhattan is the most amazing production of the human species. Nowhere on the face of the Earth, either now or ever, has so high a population density been supported over so sizable an area at so high a standard of living. And, physically, nowhere on the face of the Earth, now or ever, has anything been constructed by man to equal the skyline of Manhattan — that vast complex of enormous and intricate structures. By comparison, the Pyramids and the Great Wall are just what they are — huge heaps of dead rock.

Consider, too, that, for a variety of historic reasons, New York City has drawn to itself an incredible diversity of people, languages and cultures — again to a point never seen elsewhere, either now or in the past. The great cities of ancient times were only foreshadowing whispers, even the greatest of them. And as for Tokyo and Shanghai, which are greater than New York in terms of numbers, they are each a homogeneous mass — one language, one culture. Only New York comes near to holding within itself all the variegated splendor of humanity.

The song goes: "New York, New York — it's a wonderful town." yes, it is — but it may be dying.

New York City is not a nation, so it can't police its boundaries. It can't prevent the affluent leaving for the suburbs, or for California. It can't prevent the indigent from entering. To its credit, it has never wanted to.

Many thousands of immigrants have entered New York, have been helped, educated, given jobs, introduced to the American way of life. The crowds, the cold-water flats, the sweatshops, weren't Nirvana, but where would it have been better? They made their way and their children and grandchildren did well — and left New York for greener places.

The Golden Door was closed to all but a trickle of immigrants, half a century ago (just one year *after* I myself arrived), but there are now many thousands of "immigrants" reaching New York from other parts of the nation. They, too, are indigent; they, too, need help; but now New York is in financial trouble and it cannot help, and no one wants to help it help either. It can no longer be the gateway to the American dream and people laugh at it for trying. Fiscal irresponsibility, it is called.

What hurts is that I'm afraid that among those who laugh and sneer at New York are the descendants of some of the Europeans who learned how to be Americans in New York — mockers who now feel no need to repay or

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to pass on to others the good their parents and grandparents have received.

New York is not alone in the miseries that the changes since World War II have brought to it. It is the largest city, the one with the softest heart, and therefore the one that makes the best target — but make no mistake, it is the head of the spear. Where it goes, the rest of the nation will follow. If the nation is to be saved, New York must be saved.

Let's consider the new wave of immigrants that have entered New York City since World War II. A large percentage of them are Blacks and Hispanics, looking for a better life now as my parents did half a century ago.

New York is now the largest Black city in the world. Africa's largest Black city is Kinshasa, Zaire, which has a population of 1,623,760. New York City, however, contains 1,666,636 Blacks. (Mind you, I don't trust either figure to the last digit or even to the nearest ten thousand, but that's what the censuses say.)

New York has been steadily Blackening since World War II, and so has every other large city in the United States. Let's consider (in Table 6) those cities which contain more than 100,000 Blacks (twenty-five of them) and list them in order of percentage-Black as of 1970, and compare that with the percentage-Black of 1960. I've never seen a table quite like this anywhere, but I'll prepare it for you out of Almanac data. (And remember that the percentage of Blacks in the nation as a whole is about 11.1.)

Table 6 - Black Percentages

City	Black Population (1970)	Percent Black 1970	1960
1 - Washington, D.C.	537,712	71.1	53.9
2 - Newark, N.J.	207,458	54.2	34.0
3 - Atlanta, Ga.	255,051	51.3	38.2
4 - Baltimore, Md.	420,210	46.4	34.7
5 - New Orleans, La.	267,308	45.0	37.2
6 - Detroit, Mich.	660,428	43.7	28.9
7 - Birmingham, Ala.	126,388	42.0	39.6
8 - Richmond, Va.	104,766	42.0	41.8
9 - St. Louis, Mo.	254,191	40.9	28.6
10 - Memphis, Tenn.	242,513	38.9	37.0

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11 - Cleveland, O.	287,841	38.3	28.6
12 - Oakland, Calif.	124,710	34.5	22.8
13 - Philadelphia, Pa.	653,791	33.6	26.4
14 - Chicago, Ill.	1,102,620	32.7	22.9
15 - Cincinnati, O.	125,070	27.6	21.6
16 - Houston, Tex.	316,551	25.7	22.9
17 - Dallas, Tex.	210,238	24.9	19.0
18 - Jacksonville, Fla.	118,158	22.3	52.6
19 - Kansas City, Mo.	112,005	22.1	17.5
20 - New York, New York	1,666,636	21.2	14.0
21 - Pittsburgh, Pa.	104,904	20.2	16.7
22 - Indianapolis, Ind.	134,320	18.0	20.6
23 - Los Angeles, Calif.	503,606	17.9	13.5
24 - Boston, Mass.	104,707	16.3	9.0
25 - Milwaukee, Wis.	105,088	14.7	8.4

The only two cities in which the Black percentage dropped during the 1960s are Jacksonville and Indianapolis. Both cities, however, enlarged their areas in the last decade, I believe, bringing in largely White suburban areas, so that the figures for the two years are not comparable.

Elsewhere, we can see that the Black percentage is going up rapidly, partly because Blacks are moving into the cities from rural areas and partly because Whites are moving out of the cities into suburbs. As a matter of fact, the White efflux is often greater than the Black influx, so that the population of some of the large cities of the United States is actually dropping despite the continuing population increase in the nation as a whole.

As examples, between 1950 and 1970, Cleveland's population dropped from 915,000 to 751,000, and Boston's from 801,000 to 641,000. This is a population loss of 324,000 for the two cities, even while the nation's population went up 52,000,000 in those two decades.

Since, as it happens, it is the prosperous who move out of the cities and the indigent who move in, most American cities find that less money can be raised by taxes, and more money for salaries, services, and welfare must be spent.

Where is the money to come from?

Perhaps from nowhere. Rural areas and small towns have traditionally distrusted and disliked the cities, and since small towns and rural areas

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have always been proportionately over-represented in the various state legislatures, and even in Congress, cities routinely get the back of the hand from the states and nation.

The rural areas and small towns have been playing less and less of a role in American life, to be sure. In 1776, some 95 percent of the entire nation was rural, whereas in 1960, only 30 percent of the population did not live in or near a city of over 50,000 population. In 1970, the figure had dropped further to 26.5 percent.

The cities, however did not gain as the rural areas lost. It was the suburbs that gained, the affluent suburbs, which depend on the city economically, but, Pilate-like, wash their hands of its troubles.

Increasingly, though rarely mentioned out loud, the division between suburb and city is the division between White and Black, between Anglo and Hispano, between rich and poor. It is not considered polite any longer in the United States to say nasty things about Blacks and Puerto Ricans and the poor (except among friends, of course), but it serves just the same purpose to say nasty things about the cities, and that can be done out loud in the best circles.

And one city in particular, in the face of nation-wide changes (and even world-wide changes, if we're going to talk about energy shortages and inflation) has foolishly attempted to maintain the standards of a more idealistic day. It has tried to be more generous to its poor and its employees than others are, and to offer more services than others do. Naturally, it went broke in the process, and the President of the nation makes political hay out of encouraging people to laugh at New York. He makes fun of the city at home and abroad, and refuses to help.

What the heck, *he's* all right; the leak isn't at *his* end of the boat.

(*Films, from p. 96*)

a gloriously beautiful Ariel who wears Russian cossack hats and Egyptian draperies to equally good effect, and plays magnificently on the violin or the tuba as Phibes commits his dreadful deeds. Or maybe it's that coffin that's an exact duplicate of a Rolls Royce hood. Or...oh, see it yourself if you haven't. A word of warning, though. It was badly edited even on its initial theater showing, and is even more so on television.

The first Phibes film, *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, showed up the same week, and while it's jolly good fun, this is one of those rare instances where the sequel makes the first look downright pale in comparison.

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This superior entertainment combines sf with a mystery puzzle and concerns the invention of a multi-dimensional art form that produces astonishingly real illusions.

Paradise Beach

by RICHARD COWPER

"Who?" demanded the voice from the So-Vi speaker, while the features on the screen contorted themselves into a parody of amused incredulity. "Ketchup?"

"Kets*koff*. Igor Ketskoff. Don't say you've never *heard* of him, Margot."

"I've never heard of him," said the face on the screen, and laughed. Then, relenting, asked: "What does he *do* exactly, Zeph?"

"*Trompe l'oeil* illusions. Murals. *You* know."

"Oh. Like Rex Whistler, you mean?"

"Not a bit like Rex Whistler. Well, maybe a *tiny* bit. Igor uses — hang on, I've got it here somewhere — 'microminiaturized, solid-state, depth-fluorescence technology to create his modern miracles of multidimensional anamorphosis.'"

"Ana — *what*?"

"Morphosis. That's what it says here, anyway."

"What's it mean?"

"*I* don't know. Illusion, I suppose. Anyway, Margot, the point is he's doing one for us."

"'Us'? You mean Hugo's *agreed?*"

"Hugo com*missioned* it! Igor's under contract to some weird little outfit called *Artefax*. S & L got them as part of a blanket take-over in February. When Hugo got round to sorting things out and weeding out what they didn't want, he stumbled across *Artefax* and Igor."

"I *see*. Still, I must confess I'm a bit surprised, Zeph. I mean I've never thought of Sir Hugo as a patron of the fine arts exactly."

"Between the two of us, sweetie, he sees it more in the nature of an investment. By the way, you're invited to the private view on the 10th."

"Ah! Now I'm getting warmer! All Hugo's tame tycoons assemble to gawp, then rush back to

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Lombard Street and order an Igor ana-whatsit to grace their board-rooms. *Artefax* shares go into orbit, and Sherwood and Lazarus, Merchant Bankers, stagger home with the loot. Right?"

"What a cynical girl you are, Margot."

"I know. It's all part of my charm, Zeph."

Zephyr Sherwood laughed. "The 10th, then. Seven thirty. And don't forget."

"Try keeping me away."

The gathering which assembled in Astral Court, W.1., for Sir Hugo and Lady Sherwood's private view contained at least five ex-lovers of Zephyr's and a fair cross-section of the merchant banking fraternity. Margot Brierly cooly appraised the combined capital resources of a mere half dozen guests as being, by 1992 standards, well on the upward slope of five million New Pounds — that is to say five hundred million in Old Sterling. She found the knowledge lent them a charm they would otherwise have lacked. Fortunately, Zephyr had seen fit to leaven the dough with a lavish sprinkling of talents chosen from among her numerous friends and acquaintances. Margot recognized three So-Vi stars; a *very* striking transvestite who ran a syndicated trans-European fashion column; and a remarkably hairy young footballer, who, she recalled, had recently been transferred from one club to another for a record-breaking fee. (Could *he* be Zephyr's latest?)

Extricating herself from the predatory tendrils of a lesser Lombard Street gnome, Margot wriggled her way through the throng to where Zephyr was holding court, swinging gently to and fro from a rococo *balancoire*. Having restrained her friend in midswoop Margot said, "Well, come on. Which is he, dear?"

"Which is who?"

"Igor Thingummy, of course."

Zephyr beckoned to the perambulating auto-butler, exchanged her empty champagne glass for a full one from the proffered tray and gestured with a bejeweled hand towards a knot of guests, among whom Margot recognized only Sir Hugo Sherwood. "Iggy's the little pet with the mustache," said Zephyr. "Isn't he a dink?"

The little pet in question chose that moment to glance towards his hostess. His teeth flashed like a space beacon. In response to Zephyr's fluttered fingers he came scuttling across to her side.

"Iggy, I want you to meet Margot Brierly," said Zephyr. "She writes those *fabulously* intelligent detective stories."

"Enchante," said Igor, clicking his heels and bowing from the waist

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with clockwork precision. He straightened and eyed Margot caressingly up and down. "Ah," he breathed, "but *you* I could im*mort*alize, madame!"

Margot restrained an impulse to feel if her dress was still fastened and smiled ingenuously. "I've been wanting to ask you what anamorphosis is, Mr ...."

"Ketskoff," grinned Zephyr. "Rhymes with Ketskoff."

"Oh, that is simple enough," said Igor airily. "The word itself is derived from the Greek. It means 'to change the form of' The artists of the Renaissance discovered that by copying faithfully the reflection which they saw in a distorting mirror they could, as it were, encode a vision. Their vision could only be *de*-coded by placing before it a mirror similar to that in which they had first viewed the original reflection."

"Like that picture by Holbein in the N.G.?" said Margot brightly. "You know the one — with the two men and the lute."

"*The Ambassadors,* madame," said Igor, obviously rather impressed. "However, I use the term in a somewhat less restricted sense. The mirror *I* employ is nothing less than the psychokinetic field of the observer himself. No two people see precisely the same Ketskoff. The modulations are infinite and infinitely subtle."

"And infinitely expensive?"

"They are not cheap, certainly. But then you must remember that each one is individually styled and structured round it's owner's personal psychoemotive threshold. That demands considerable technical finesse."

"If you're ready, Igor?" Sir Hugo hove up alongside Zephyr's swing, beamed blandly at Margot and raised an interrogative eyebrow.

"Everything is in order, Sir Hugo. I have arranged for the main lighting to be subdued just before we switch on."

"Excellent. I'll shepherd them down, say my few words and leave the rest to you." The banker consulted his wristwatch. "Kick off in five minutes from now?"

Igor nodded, bowed briefly to Margot and Zephyr and scurried away down the shallow flight of stairs to the mezzanine where one long wall was concealed from view behind heavy, plum-colored velvet drapes.

"Well, what do you make of him?" enquired Zephyr.

"I'm not sure," said Margot pensively. "I think I detect something a shade spooky."

"Little Iggy, *spooky?* For heaven's sake! He's just a pet."

"House trained?"

Zephyr tinkled a laugh. "Come on," she said. "If we want the best

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view, we'd better get downstairs."

Sir Hugo's speech was brief and to the point. For one hundred and fifty years, ever since the invention of the camera, pictorial art and scientific technology had been struggling to come to terms with one another, though without notable success. Theirs had been a genuine love/hate relationship in which both strove for domination. Fundamental to the artists' deep distrust was the realization that what the machine had created once, it could create again and again, whereas the artist's vision was essentially unique. The invention of neo-anamorphics had resolved, once and for all, the ancient dilemma. It was, he sincerely believed, the ultimate art form of the 21st Century, and Igor Ketskoff would inevitably be ranked with such names as Kandinsky and Picasso. Let those present judge for themselves.

The lights dimmed precipitately to total blackout; there was a gentle purring as the drapes parted; and then, with all the nerve-tingling impact of a lightning flash, illumination flooded out of the wall. There was a concerted gasp from the assembled guests; hands rose to shade dazzled eyes; and then spontaneous applause erupted mingled with cries of "Superb! "Incredible!" "Formidable!"

To Margot the illusion was, indeed, wholly astonishing. It was exactly as if an area some 5 meters by 2 had been removed bodily from the penthouse wall and replaced by an unglazed window which looked out upon a curving Caribbean beach. To the left, tall feathery palms rustled in the gentlest of breezes, dappling a carpet of dusky shadow as they receded into the eye-aching distance along the silver-white margin of the cove. Pellucid wavelets gamboled in to subside like sleepy kittens on the gently shelving sand. Far out to sea a line of twinkling spray marked where the submerged reef was absorbing the force of the Atlantic rollers. As illusion it was perfect — *too* perfect! It *had* to be real!

Moving hesitantly forward, Margot stretched out her hand and felt — nothing at all! It was exactly as if, at the moment of contact with the invisible barrier which separated her hand from the sandy shore she could see so clearly, all physical sensation was short-circuited, the reassuring messages no longer flowed through the nerve endings in her fingertips to her brain. She felt totally disorientated, closed her eyes and stepped backwards. Had she been a cat, every single hair on her body would have been standing upright. She shivered so violently that she all but dropped the glass she was holding.

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"Well," murmured Zephyr, "I think we rate this one a genuine *tour de force*, don't you?"

Margot nodded. "Where is it supposed to be?" she asked.

"Paradise Beach, Grenada. Hey, just get an eyeful of *that*!"

Margot turned again to the panorama. The glittering sand ribboned out and rippled away into the azure distance, remote and calm and beautiful. "An eyeful of what?" she asked.

Zephyr was staring fixedly at a point somewhere in the left foreground. On her face was an expression of almost envious curiosity. "Well, I'll be damned," she murmured.

"What is it?" Margot insisted.

"Those two," hissed Zephyr. "Hey, he's *all* man, isn't he?"

Margot screwed up her eyes and saw only a foraging spidercrab scuttling sideways across the distant strand. "What are you talking about?" she said. "Who's 'all man'?"

A flush like a faint fingerprint colored Zephyr's cheeks. Her eyes sparkled. "Wow!" she whispered, and again: "*Wow!*"

Margot glanced rapidly round at the other guests. Several of them appeared to be staring as if hypnotized by one point or another of the anamorphic. At that moment a familiar voice breathed in her ear: "Is it not as I said, *madame*? No two people see exactly the same Ketskoff."

She jerked round to find Igor smirking at her. "But what *are* they seeing?" she demanded.

Igor shrugged. "Why ask me? I supply only the canvas and the frame. They paint their own pictures."

"And how about Sir Hugo? I mean, after all, it's *his*, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is. I have here in my pocket his check to prove it."

"Well, what does *he* get out of it?"

Igor sniggered. "He reserves to himself the right to play Prospero. After all, *madame*, it is *his* island." He flashed his teeth at her in a gleaming grin. "And now it is time for me to see how the fat fish are nibbling," he whispered. "*Au revoir, chere madame.*"

"Zeph! I've been trying to get hold of you for *weeks*! Where on earth have you been?"

"Brazil, of course. Where else?"

"Why Brazil, for heaven's sake?"

"Oh, come off it, Margot. *Think.*"

"The coffee?"

"The World Cup, you prune."

"Football? And since when have you .... *Ah-h-h*!"

The beautiful face on the So-Vi gave a smug, lip-licking grin. "Oh,

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it's a great sport, Margot. The greatest."

"Yes?"

"Well, let's say the second greatest."

"Did you win?"

"I wasn't *playing*, dear. Just watching. We were knocked out in the semifinal. The ref had been got at."

"By you?"

"Ah, if only I'd thought of it!"

"I'm sure you will next time. How's Hugo?"

"Oh, banking away busily as usual. You know Hugo."

"Zeph, doesn't he *mind*?"

"Mind what?"

"*You* know. Your extra-connubial activities. Ball games and so on."

"Well, naturally I don't make a point of *discussing* it with him, if that's what you mean."

"But he must *know*, Zeph."

"A banker's wife needs her little hobbies, dear."

"Plural?"

"Oh, most singularly plural," agreed Zephyr and produced one of those tinkling little laughs of hers which always set Margot's teeth on edge. "And what have you been up to, sweetie?"

"Scribbling away," said Margot. "I've just finished the first draft of another Inspector Galloway. Provisional title: *Quietus in Triplicate.*"

"Well done, you. Been to any parties?"

"A couple. Dull to middling. Oh, I bumped into Igor at one."

"Igor Ketskoff?"

"How many Igors do you know, for heaven's sake? He told me he'd got three new commissions. Seemed pretty pleased with himself. How's *Paradise Beach* by the way?"

"Hugo had it moved up into his study while I was away. Said it dominated the mezzanine too much. He's probably right."

"I'm surprised you *can* move them."

"*Artefax* handled all that. I daresay it cost a bomb though. Hey, before I forget, Margot, are you doing anything on Friday?"

"Friday? No, I don't think so. Nothing I can't put off. Why?"

"Come down to Hickstead with me."

"*Hickstead*! What on earth for?"

"The show jumping, idiot."

"*Show jumping*! I didn't think you knew one end of a horse from the other."

"Strictly between us, dear, I still have to think it out. But I met someone in Sao Paulo who spends most of his daylight hours sitting on the top of one of them."

"Zeph, you are absolutely *incorrigible!*"

"No, dear, just curious."

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"Margot, are you frantically busy, or can you spare an old friend a few minutes?"

"Hello, Zeph! Where are you calling from?"

"The Continental Club. Fredrico's booked in here for the Royal Show."

"Fredrico? Oh, yes. I remember. Captain Gonzales. We met at Hickstead, didn't we?"

"That's right. Now listen, Margot. You'd say I was a pretty level-headed type, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, to a fault, dear."

"Not prone to imagining things?"

"Not since *I've* known you. Why?"

"Well, there's something very odd going on."

"Odd?"

"I mean I'm quite sure there must *be* a perfectly logical explanation but I just can't think what it is."

"Explanation of *what*, Zeph?"

"Hugo's behavior."

"*Hugo*? What on earth's he been up to?"

"That's just what *I'd* like to know."

"Just a moment, old thing. Why don't you start at the beginning and put me in the picture?"

"What makes you say *that*?"

"Say what, Zeph?"

"About being put in the picture."

"I only mean I'm not *with you*! You start off telling me you think something odd's going on. Then you hint it's something to do with Hugo. I'm only trying to find my bearings, old thing."

"I'm sorry. I suppose the fact is I'm a wee bit jumpy. Where was I?"

"Something odd about Hugo. Well, what *is* it?"

"He's sunburnt."

Margot did not say anything but her expression was eloquent.

"You don't believe me?"

"Of course I believe you, Zeph, but I must confess I don't —"

"He's got a tan on him like a lifeguard on Bondi Beach."

"Well, so he's been soaking it up in a Solar Parlor. What's so odd about —"

"He hasn't. I checked."

"Now why should you do that?"

"Because I had to be *sure*, Margot."

The eyes of the two friends met fair and square on their respective screens. "A U-V lamp?" suggested Margot tentatively.

"No," said Zephyr.

"Well, he can hardly have got it from lying out on the roof. We've barely seen the sun in London for the past month."

"Fifty-seven hours, thirty-two minutes, and all but six of them during banking hours."

"My! You *have* been busy!"

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"I checked with the Met Office."

"You're really taking this seriously, aren't you?"

Zephyr nodded. "I wasn't at first," she said. "But then I found the sand."

"?"

"In Hugo's bed."

"Sand in Hugo's bed," repeated Margot feebly.

"Fine *white* sand, Margot. Coral sand!"

Margot fought down an impulse to giggly wildly. "You had it *an*alyzed?"

"I didn't need to. I recognized it at once."

"Ah."

"You see what I'm driving at, don't you?"

"Well, now, Zeph. Since you ask me straight out I must —"

"*Paradise Beach!*"

"Oh, Zeph! For God's *sake*!"

"I know. It's crazy."

"But surely you've *asked* him about it? What does he —"

"Margot, how *can* I?" — it was a wail of distress — "I mean — well, we both know it's *impossible*!"

Being a reasonably perceptive woman, Margot had some inkling of why Zephyr could not simply let matters rest. However long a cable Lady Sherwood permitted herself, Sir Hugo was the Rock of Ages into which her anchor was fixed. She *had* to be sure of him, and now, for the first time in the ten years of their marriage, she was not sure; her world was shaking to its very foundations; she was finding herself in the one place she could never bear to be — outside. Admirably suppressing a desire to say: "It serves you right, my dear," Margot nodded thoughtfully and inquired: "Well, what now?"

Zephyr looked like a gin player whose opponent has just laid down the very card she has been waiting for. "Would you come over for coffee tomorrow morning, Margot? About eleven?"

"To Astral Court?"

"Yes, of course."

"All right."

Zephyr sighed. "*Le estoy muy agradecido.*"

"*Con mucho gusto*," replied Margot, not to be outdone.

Lady Sherwood's greeting to her friend as she opened the door of the Astral Court apartment next morning might, in more normal circumstances, have been considered somewhat eccentric. From behind her back she produced what looked like a golden brown bootlace and proceeded to wave it before Margot's nose. "Seaweed!" she whispered tragically. "This morning. In the shower."

"No land crabs yet?" inquired Margot weakly.

Zephyr shuddered. "I haven't

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dared to look under the bed."

They drank their coffee on the balcony overlooking Hyde Park. At Zephyr's suggestion they each had a morale booster in the shape of a stiff peg of Napoleon 5-star cognac. Then from the pocket of her Spocorelli housecoat Zephyr produced a shiny new key which she laid on the Hester Bateman tray beside the Paul Lamarie cream jug.

Margot peered down. "You mean to say Hugo keeps his study locked?"

Zephyr nodded. "Ever since I got back from Brazil."

"Did he say why?"

"Something about *Artefax* and the rewiring. I didn't pay much attention."

"But, Zeph, that was over a *month* ago!"

Zephyr shrugged.

"Well, what *did* you find when you went in?"

"I haven't *been* in — yet. I only got that key cut yesterday afternoon. After I'd called you."

"Then how do you know it fits?"

"I tried it this morning."

"And you didn't go in?"

Zephyr shook her head. "I just *couldn't*," she said. "Not on my own."

"But this is ri*dic*ulous," said Margot, picking up the key. "Come on."

She led the way purposefully up the stairs from the mezzanine, along the gallery past the bedrooms and paused outside the door of Sir Hugo's study. "Do *you* want to?" she said. "Or shall I?"

"You," whispered Zephyr.

Margot put her ear to the door, held her breath and then, somewhat absurdly, knocked. There was no response. She poked the key into the lock, twisted it firmly, turned the porcelain handle and pushed.

The door opened quite silently, and the two women peered into the room. "Well, no land crabs at any rate," said Margot and gave a sort of nervous hiccup of laughter.

"Look!" whispered Zephyr. "Over there on the chair by the desk."

"What is it?"

"His beach robe."

Abandoning the door knob which she had been clutching, Margot advanced into the study, picked up the robe and examined it. It was faintly damp. On an impulse she raised it to her face and sniffed. It smelt rather of stale sweat. But was there something else as well? A faint, tingling aroma of iodine? Or ozone? Or salt? She dropped the garment back on to the chair and looked all round the room. "It's darker than I remember it," she said.

"Well, of course it is," said Zephyr. "He had the third window

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blocked up to take the anamorphic."

As Margot padded across the deep-piled Afghan carpet to where the closed draped concealed Igor Ketskoff's masterpiece, something crunched faintly under her foot. She stopped and thrust her fingers into the dense wool to disclose the remnants of a small crushed mollusk together with a considerable quantity of fine white sand.

"What is it?" asked Zephyr.

"Nothing," said Margot, straightening up and twitching at the curtain. "Where's the switch for this thing?"

"On the wall over there, I think." Zephyr took a hesitant pace in the direction she indicated and then halted. "You do it, Margot."

Three steps carried Margot to the switch panel. She pushed the top button. The curtains whispered apart to reveal the 5 by 2 meter rectangle of opaque and velvet blackness. "Ready?" she said.

Zephyr nodded dumbly.

"Here goes," said Margot and thrust home the second button.

Even in competition with the London daylight the anamorphic still contrived to take their breath away. It was as though the mere act of throwing a switch had transported them both, miraculously and instantaneously, five thousand miles westward across the Atlantic. The sheer perfection of the illusion was utterly uncanny. And yet it was not the familiar wonder of the panorama that held them as if spellbound, rather was it the twin lines of naked footprints which strode so briskly and purposefully outward across the sand to the water's edge and then back again to the very frame of the anamorphic.

The two women, staring in numb and fascinated silence, watched the tide-nudged wavelets come lapping in like lazy tongues to lick away one print after another. Ten minutes later all that was left before their astounded gaze was the smooth silvery flank of the scoured coral and a waste of inscrutable, sparkling waters.

At that moment, with a rather harsh and unpleasant sound, Zephyr began to cry.

The first thing Margot did when she returned home was to try to contact Igor Ketskoff on the So-Vi. She managed it eventually and was a little piqued to realize that he had obviously forgotten who she was. Having refreshed his memory for him, she saw his face take on the eager but faintly speculative expression of a cat which has heard the familiar sound of the can opener. "But of *course*!" he cried. "*Chere madame Margot*! The Agatha Christie of our age! To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"It's rather awkward to explain

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over the So-Vi, Igor. I was wondering if you could possibly meet me for dinner this evening?"

Igor's eyebrows twitched for a culculating second, and then the smile flashed on like a strip light. "But that would be de*light*ful, madame! And where shall it be?"

"Do you know Angosturo's"

"Indeed I do."

"I'll book us a table right away. Would about eight suit you?"

"Admirably."

He arrived, brimful of apologies half an hour late, by which time Margot was already contemplating the olive at the bottom of her second martini. He snatched her hands to his lips and set about them as if they were a pair of pretzels. "A thousand pardons, *chere madame*," he mourned. "I am desolated."

"And I'm hungry," said Margot.

"That too," agreed Igor and clicked his fingers imperiously for the waiter. "Another martini for madame," he commanded. "And for me a *pastis*." Then he took his seat opposite her, leaned forward and, lowering his voice, inquired meaningfully: "And what is too awkward for you to explain to me over the So-Vi?"

"I should perhaps have said "too complicated," replied Margot, divining that he had almost certainly misconstrued the object of her invitation.

"But Ketskoff thrives upon complexity," said Igor smugly. "He sucked it from his mother's teats," adding by way of explanation: "I am Armenian."

Margot's eyes widened. "An Armenian *and* a genius," she murmured.

Igor purred. "No doubt you are wishing to model for me?"

"Dare I?"

Igor laughed. "Madame Margot, I like you very much. You have style. I too have style."

"And Lady Sherwood?" enquired Margot curiously.

A shadow ducked across the dark eyes. "No," he said. "Zest, yes. Flamboyance, yes. Style — *true* style — alas, no." The drinks appeared and Igor raised his in a toast. "To style," he said.

"To style," murmured Margot. She took a sip, smiled across at him and decided to try the direct approach. "Igor," she said, "I want to ask you a question. It may sound crazy — *I* think it *is* crazy — but even so I must hear your answer to it."

"So? Go ahead. I like crazy questions."

Margot took another fortifying sip at her drink. "Would it be possible," she said, carefully spacing out her words, "for someone who *owned* one of your anamorphics — the person it was

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actually *designed* for, I mean — to —" she swallowed — "to — well — *enter* it?"

Igor looked genuinely at a loss. "Enter it?" he echoed. "I do not understand. You speak in metaphor, of course."

"No. Quite literally. Could they *actually step into it*? Like you and I walked into this restaurant, say?"

Igor laughed. "What a poetic idea! So we take a stroll through our anamorphics instead of the park! Delicious!"

"But not possible?"

"Oh, utterly impossible. An anamorphic is basically a malleable illusion — nothing more, nothing less."

"You're quite sure of that, Igor? I mean it couldn't somehow be, well, *modified* or something?"

"Madame Margot, that I am an electronics engineer of genius I admit. Perhaps I am even something more. An artist, dare I say? But I am not, alas, a magician. Only think, for one moment, what it is you are implying by your simple question! At the very least, the existence of an enantiomorphic universe and the instantaneous demolition and reconstruction of all our known scientific laws! In short, a physical impossibility. But as an *idea* — wholly enchanting!"

Margot released the breath she was not even aware she had been holding. "And there's not the slightest chance you could be mistaken?"

"None, madame, that I do assure you. But tell me, what made you ask?"

Margot laughed. "For a whole afternoon I've been thinking I'd hit on a simple *marvelous* way of disposing of an unwanted corpse."

Aided by a capsule of sieston, Margot slept late. On returning from her *tete-a-tete* with Igor she had debated whether to contact Zephyr and pass on her good news, but some mildly feline streak in her character persuaded her that it could wait until the morning. After all, why should she deny Sir Hugo his little bit of fun? If anyone had earned it he had.

It was close on midday when she eventually confronted her So-Vi and tapped out the Sherwood's code. The screen informed her that the number was temporarily unobtainable. She waited a minute, tried again, and got the same result. She was just about to look up the number of the Continental Club when she heard a buzz at her own apartment door. She walked through the minuscule hall and applied her eye to the spy hole. "Who is it?"

"Police." An identity card bearing the name *Detective Sergeant Warren* was presented to the outside lens.

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Mystified, Margot slid back the safety chain and opened the door.

"Just a routine enquiry, Miss Brierly," said the sergeant. "Is it all right if I come in?"

"Yes, of course." Margot closed the door behind him and led the way into her small, book-lined sitting room.

"I assume you've seen this morning's paper, ma'am."

"No," said Margot. "Should I?"

"Ah," said the sergeant, "well in that case it looks as if I've come as the bearer of some bad news."

"What bad news?"

"Lady Sherwood is dead."

Margot simply stared at him.

"You were a friend of hers, I believe, Miss Brierly?"

Margot nodded. "Dead," she repeated woodenly. "How?"

"A fall, ma'am. Late last night."

"What sort of a fall?"

"From the roof of Astral Court."

"*The roof!* What in God's name was she doing up on the roof?"

"I meant from the top floor, actually. From a window. Over a hundred meters away."

Margot shuddered.

The sergeant consulted his notebook. "I believe you called on Lady Sherwood yesterday, Miss Brierly?"

"Yes," said Margot. "I had coffee with her. In the morning."

"And was she her normal self, would you say?"

"Well, yes."

"You sound a bit hesitant."

"Well, she *was* a bit anxious — about Sir Hugo."

"Yes?"

"It was nothing. A sort of odd fancy she'd got. Quite absurd really."

"And what sort of a fancy was that, Miss Brierly?"

"About an anamorphic he has — that's a kind of illusion screen — a sort of moving picture. Maybe you've seen it?"

"I think I've seen what's left of it," said the sergeant flatly. "I assume that's the one."

"In Sir Hugo's study?"

The sergeant nodded.

"Why? What's happened to it?"

"Lady Sherwood fell through it, Miss Brierly."

"*Through it*! Oh, but that's quite impossible ..."

"Go on."

"The window," murmured Margot. "It was in front of the middle window. But that window's blocked in."

"No," said the Sergeant. "Just painted over black on the inside. Sir Hugo has explained to us how he didn't wish to spoil the symmetry of the facade by having it bricked up."

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"Sir Hugo was there when it happened?"

"Oh, no. Lady Sherwood was alone in the apartment. Sir Hugo was officiating at a Masonic function in the City. He was actually making his speech when the accident took place."

Margot felt as if ice-cold ants were crawling all over her body. "Then it *was* an accident?"

"There's no question about that. As a matter of fact the only reason I'm here now is that there is one rather odd feature of the case which Sir Hugo hasn't been able to explain."

"What was that?"

"Lady Sherwood was wearing only a bikini."

Margot stared at him. "Yes," she said slowly. "That would make sense, I suppose."

"I don't follow you."

"And had she been drinking too?"

"Well, officially I can't answer that till they've held the inquest. Unofficially, yes she had."

"Dutch courage, Sergeant."

The sergeant's eyes went curiously opaque. "You mean you think Lady Sherwood took her own life, Miss Brierly?"

"*Zeph! Kill herself?* Oh, good Lord, no! Not in a million years!"

"Then I'm afraid I don't —"

"You've never seen an anamorphic? Not one that's working?"

Sergeant Warren shook his head.

"Well, you should. Because when you do you'll understand how someone who's taken on rather too much to drink *could* get it into their head that what they were seeing wasn't just an illusion but was reality itself. Providing they had the nerve to try. I believe poor Zeph was the victim of a mirage — a too-perfect illusion — and too much cognac."

The sergeant pursed up his lips and nodded. "That's more or less what we thought, Miss Brierly." He closed up his notebook and slipped it into his pocket. "Believe me, I'm sorry I had to be the one to break the news to you. You've been most helpful. I shouldn't imagine you'd be called on to give evidence at the inquest, but that's not really in my hands."

"I understand, Sergeant. Anyway, if you do need me, you know where to find me."

Margot was not called upon. The verdict arrived at was "Accidental Death" and the coroner went out of his way to express the court's sympathy with the bereaved. The funeral service was private and confined to next of kin. Zephyr's body was cremated. After if was over, Sir Hugo left for a holiday in the West Indies and was away for three months.

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A fortnight after his return Margot was surprised to receive an invitation to dine with him one evening in Astral Court. Curiosity prompted her to accept, and she arrived at the penthouse to be greeted by her sun-bronzed host, who introduced her first to a ravishingly beautiful young West Indian whom he addressed as "Blossom," and then to Igor.

The first difference Margot noticed on entering the apartment was that the wall area on the mezzanine was once again occupied. "A new Ketskoff?" she asked.

"Yes and no," said Sir Hugo.

"May I see?"

"Indeed you shall, Margot. It is one of the reasons I asked you along this evening. But let us dine first. My exquisite Blossom has spent all day concocting her Grenadian specialities for us, and who knows better than a Grenadian how to stimulate the jaded palate?" So saying, he smiled drily and ushered them to the table.

Blossom's culinary skills fully justified Sir Hugo's advertisement. The meal was as delicious as the wines which accompanied it, and when they eventually rose from the table, it was as if they were each surrounded by a private golden aura of sensual gratification.

Sir Hugo directed them to the long sofa which had been drawn round to face the curtained anamorphic and then took his place beside the control panel. "And now, as a reward to Blossom, I intend to waft her home to Grenada." The lights dimmed; the curtains parted. "Ole!" cried Sir Hugo and with an appropriate flourish pressed the switch.

A cascade of brilliance flooded from the anamorphic like the surge of the Caribbean dawn.

Margot peered about for some sign of the repairs which Igor must have effected, but there was nothing visible at all. Try as she would she simply could not visualize what must have happened. Every attempt she made to thrust Zephyr's image bodily into the panorama was frustrated by that incredible perspective. Poor Zephyr simply shrank and vanished into thin air.

As she gazed, fascinated as always by the sheer perfection of the illusion, Margot perceived, far away in the remote distance, a new movement. Shading her eyes with her hand, she peered out along the curved white sickle of the beach, under the nodding, feather-headed palms, and gradually she was able to discern the two tiny figures on horseback cantering towards her out of the distance. All along the curve of the shore they galloped, coming closer and closer until she could clearly make out the forms of

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the riders: the man, swarthy-skinned, bare to the waist; the woman, wearing the briefest of bikinis, her long blonde hair streaming out along the wind to the rhythm of the ride.

They looked so happy those two, laughing as they rode, free as the sunshine and the sparkling air; the thundering hooves of their ponies — now quite distinct above the background booming of the distant surf — kicking up little shimmering fountains of rainbow spray from the edge of the sea. Right up to the anamorphic's edge they came, Zephyr and Captain Gonzales, and then they were gone, the phantom hoofbeats receding into the stereophonic distance somewhere behind Margot's head. Only the prints were left there in the sand, and the palms nodding above them in perpetual approbation.

Margot glanced sideways at Igor, wondering perhaps whether she alone had seen them, but he grinned at her cheerfully. "Some synchro, hey?"

"*You* did it?"

"Who else? It is my latest. Are you not impressed?"

"My, I'd *love* a swim in there right now!" cried Blossom, and jumping up from her place beside Margot, she ran across to the wall and reached out for the beach. And, just as Margot herself once had, Blossom drew back, frowning and rubbing her hands, complaining that it was a cheat.

Margot felt an electric tingling all up the nape of her neck. She turned back to Igor. "When it's switched on," she whispered, "you *can't* touch it, can you? There's something stopping you."

"That's right," he said. "The *Kappa* field."

"So it must have been switched off when Zeph ..."

"Of course."

"But then there wouldn't have been any *reason* for her to —"

Igor put his lips close to her ear. "She was blind drunk, madame. Didn't you know?"

Margot sank back into the cushions and stared, first at *Paradise Beach* and then at Sir Hugo, who was now standing silhouetted before it, one arm crooked around Blossom's delectable waist, the other proudly indicating familiar features of the panorama. She thought of Zephyr, alone in this very apartment, knocking back glass after glass of brandy before making her way almost defiantly up the stairs and along the gallery. She imagined her fumbling the key into the study lock, switching on the anamorphic and staring out along that shummering, sunlit beach. Was it then she had turned away and gone into her bedroom and changed into

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her costume? Or had she already done it? No, she would first have convinced herself that she hadn't been imagining it all — maybe even taking a final, reassuring look at that scrap of seaweed. Then back to the study again, her mind made up. Walking resolutely but rather unsteadily up to the wall. Taking a chair to climb on, wobbling a bit, leaning forward, pressing with her palms flat against that unyielding field, till in the end all her weight was straining forward .... But, even so, she *still* couldn't have reached the switch herself. Someone else *must* have done it. Someone actually *there*, in the room with her. And there had been no one. The inquest had confirmed it. No one at all.

"Coffee, madam? Black or white?"

Deferential as ever, programmed to perfection, the auto-butler was standing at her elbow, proffering his tray. Strong, slender metal fingers hovered above the cream jug. So unobtrusive. So discreet. A paragon among servants.

"Black, please," said Margot faintly.

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